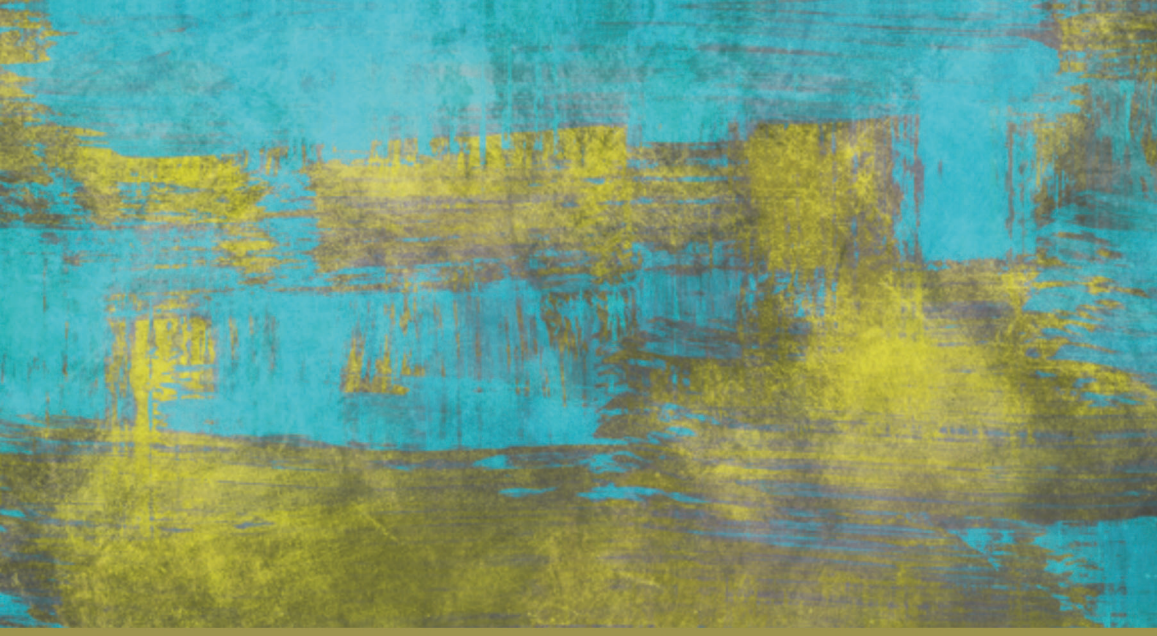
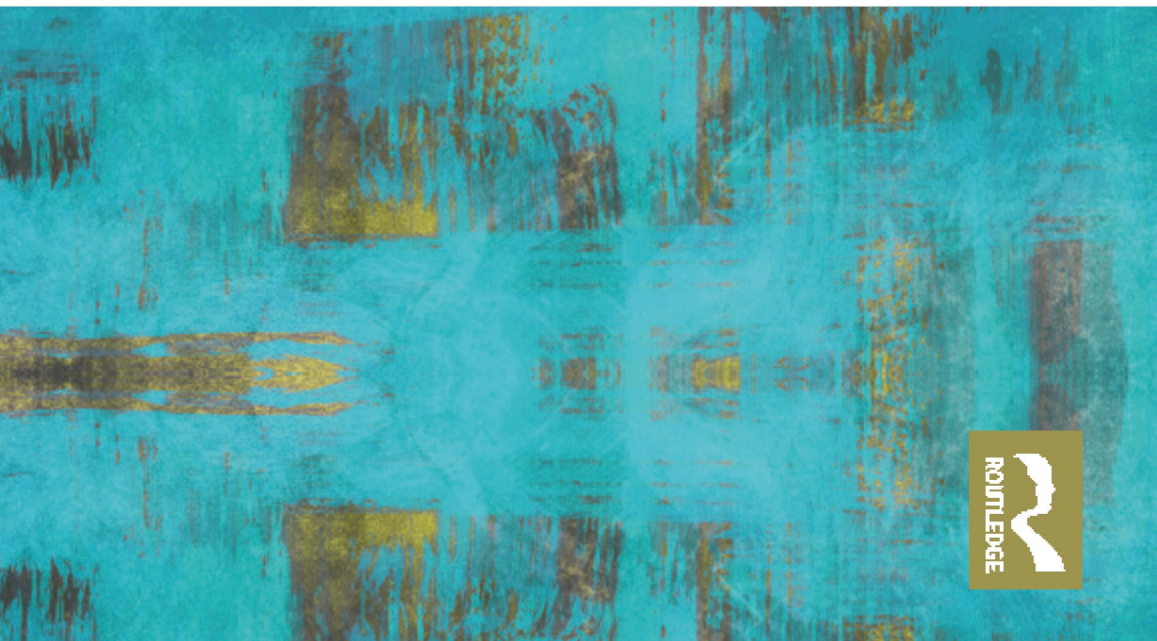


# PLATO'S EXCEPTIONAL CITY, LOVE, AND PHILOSOPHER

Nickolas Pappas



# Plato's Exceptional City, Love, and Philosopher

This book reconnoiters the appearances of the exceptional in Plato: as erotic desire (in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*), as the good city (*Republic*), and as the philosopher (*Ion*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*). It offers fresh and sometimes radical interpretations of these dialogues.

Those exceptional elements of experience – love, city, philosopher – do not escape embodiment but rather occupy the same world that contains lamentable versions of each. Thus Pappas is depicting the philosophical ambition to intensify the concepts and experiences one normally thinks with. His investigations point beyond the fates of these particular exceptions to broader conclusions about Plato's world.

*Plato's Exceptional City, Love, and Philosopher* will be of interest to any readers of Plato, and of ancient philosophy more broadly.

**Nickolas Pappas** is Professor of Philosophy at City College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY), where he has taught since 1993. Since 2017 he has been Executive Officer of Philosophy at the CUNY Graduate Center. His books include the *Routledge Philosophical Guidebook to Plato and the Republic* (Third Edition, 2013); *Politics and Philosophy in Plato's Menexenus: Education and Rhetoric, Myth and History* (co-written with Mark Zelcer, 2015); and most recently *The Philosopher's New Clothes: The Theaetetus, the Academy, and Philosophy's Turn against Fashion* (2016). He has written numerous short pieces on topics in ancient philosophy and the philosophy of art, including the entry "Plato's Aesthetics" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

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Nickolas Pappas

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# Epigraph and note

ἀστέρας εἰσαθρεῖς Ἀστὴρ ἐμός: εἴθε γενοίμην
οὐρανός, ὡς πολλοῖς ὄμμασιν εἰς σέ βλέπω.

Among the shortest works attributed to Plato, the 13-word poem that serves as this book's epigraph begins with *asteras* the stars in the sky. The little poem is addressed to a stargazing man it calls Aster (*astêr*) "star." Aster might have been his given name, which makes it a sweet coincidence that he went on to study astronomy; more likely he got the nickname because he studied the stars, as a man obsessed with baseball today might be referred to as "Mr Baseball."

The epigram addresses him fondly:

> You spot the stars, my Star; if only I could become
> Heaven, to look at you with many eyes.[1]

Aster is an earnest man, not just turning an idle eye upward. The poem says *eisathreis* "you catch sight of" the stars, gazing as if out to discover one star in particular. The same verb appears in the *Iliad* when Menelaus looks among the Trojans for Paris.[2] This is a look directed on purpose, with passion behind it.

But Aster's rapt attention is aimed at other asters. This Star wants only stars in his eyes. What he seeks out with his shrewd looks is something akin to himself. Anyone fond of Aster would be dying to break into the closed circuit of his self-regard. Here the poem's epigrammatic wit begins, with what seems at first like the wish to become a starry heaven and so a display of what Aster loves staring at. You stare at the stars and I wish I were the starry sky – and you might think I was wishing to have you stare at me, as ancient Athenian drinking songs in such double lines followed a wish for transformation with a statement of the reason: to become the loved one's object of attention. One song's narrator yearns to become an ivory lyre "and beautiful boys would

1 Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 3.29; also *Palatine Anthology* 7.669–670.
2 Homer *Iliad* 3.450.

carry me." An Anacreontic poem later in antiquity imagines being a woman's mirror "so that you'll always be looking at me."

Then the Aster poem pivots at the word *hôs* "so that." It started out appearing to belong among metamorphoses desired for passive purpose, but finishes as a love-wish of the opposite type, in which (as Patricia Rosenmeyer says) the lover "wishes to draw close and watch over the object of his love."[3] Plato reconceives the stars in heaven as seeing eyes, inverting the passive fantasy of getting in front of Aster's stare into a fantasy of control. "Your attention to the stars multiplied by an uncountable number: That would be my attention back to you."

Poetic fiat transforms what would have been the speaker's opening up to scrutiny into his reasserted dominance. I *will* be the one in charge, even if my thoughts seem to drift toward the opposite possibility.

The dominance does not confine itself to looking at the loved one. If the poem's first clause implies that Aster is aptly named, and so is a star, then a starry heaven not only sees him but also contains him. Stars have nowhere else to go. Becoming heaven means enclosing every star. What began as the wish to be seen, or started out being expressed in those words, now reveals itself as an erotic wish for total consuming command over the object of love.

*To become heaven* – what a wish. And what a wish it is to hear from Plato. The words speak to an impulse on display in his dialogues, the hope of occupying a perspective above the world yet still among its elements. This is the ambition toward an immanent transcendence.

In the poem to Aster, the perspective among the world's elements occurs in the *ouranos* "heaven, sky." Being the Greek word for heaven, *ouranos* is the only word to use. And having no choice but to call the sky *ouranos* means using perforce the name of the great father sky god, commonly "Uranus" in English. The ambitious *to become the sky* now voices itself as the wish to become the god Uranus.

The ambition to achieve divine status will be familiar to Plato's readers.[4] *This* god's status however implicates the speaker of the poem in a psychodynamic predicament. Hesiod's "starry [*asteroenth*] Uranus" mated so ardently with Earth that she could not release the children he'd begotten in her. In those first days the sky lay right down on the earth, and so she conceived but could not bear. Then their son Cronus castrated Uranus, who

3 Rosenmeyer (1992): Attic drinking songs before Plato and others of these erotic wishes, 161–165; to become a lyre (*Poetae Melici Graeci* 900 in Page 1962), 161; to be a mirror, 162–163; transformation for either passive purpose or to "draw close," 162. Rosenmeyer groups the Platonic Aster poem with others of active fantasy type, but – unusually – translates the poem into one star's wish to become many, thereby losing the reversal in it.

4 On making oneself similar to a god, see especially Plato *Theaetetus* 176a–b, *Timaeus* 90d; Armstrong (2004). Chapter 7 will return to the subject.

fled to the distant position he has occupied ever since, as far away from earth as anything is from anything.[5]

*To become heaven* also has to mean becoming the castrated god who flees. If the beloved "Star" is well named, the lover wanting to know himself as Sky is named maladroitly, for the mythical language in the poem aids and then undoes its declaration of the speaker's dominance. The myth begins with a smothering father who denies his young a free existence, as the "Oh to be heaven" wish imagines absorbing young Aster. But whereas the poem's thought resolves on that note of overwhelming control, the myth runs in the opposite direction to end up with a god unmanned and permanently denied control.

If the epigram swerves wittily from passive to active fantasy, it unwittingly recalls a story that took the contrary turn. This sabotage reminds us that just because the myths sound like fantasies, does not make them available to fantasize with at will. We come to the limits of poetic fiat. Mark Twain in memorable advice to writers compared the difference between an almost-right word and the right word to the difference between lightning bug and lightning. But when the right word for Plato to use comes from the myths he knows, its illuminating instant precedes a rumble of additional and frequently unwanted meaning. This polysemy offers one reason why the dialogues lament what their culture has to say about the gods.

The *Republic* for example speaks of "the greatest lie and about the greatest matters, not nicely lied by the one who told how Uranus did what Hesiod says he did, and how Cronus then took his revenge."[6] This great lie, lied so uglily, prevents the poem from achieving the fantasy it has in mind. Thanks to those lies that everyone repeats, the words for regal celestial love are the same words with which to invoke the end of love, shameful defeat, and the old master never again embraced.

No lover desires to desire such things. What you would want, when trying to turn Aster's head, is to keep Uranus's inescapable hold on the one he loves and jettison his later fate. The lover wishes to be Uranus in a new sense of the word. Let me become Heaven, but also let "Heaven" be only the good and happy Heaven.

Thus the lover's wish includes the wish for other words to wish with. Is this always what happens when becoming dreams of being?

If the Aster poem is a miniature of a familiar Platonic ambition, the Uranian polysemy that baffles the wish behind it suggests an encounter that keeps taking place between that ambition and the world in which Plato voices it, and the words he has available to voice it with. The logic or the narrative of the encounter begins with the dialogues' efforts to describe exceptional

5 Hesiod *Theogony*: starry Uranus, 127; mated with Earth, 156; sky lay on earth, 127; Cronus castrated Uranus, 178–180; "as far as anything is from anything," because Tartarus lies as far below earth as earth does below heaven, 720; also see Homer *Iliad* 8.10–17.

6 Plato *Republic* 2.377e5–378a1.

items: love so good it is divine, a city better than any yet told of, that best kind of claimant to wisdom the true philosopher. These items do not require the earth to turn heavenly, only that it might contain departures from its unheavenliness. And yet imagining such departures is not always imagining what you might think you're imagining.

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# Introduction

## Callicles, Alcibiades, Thrasymachus, and other readers

Plato is hard to read. The aspiration behind his dialogues' language to describe the transcending immanent might make that language beautiful, or makes it sound like nothing, or feel like some kind of trick.

It helps that the dialogues contain characters who feel and express the strongest reactions to philosophizing that Plato's reader is likely to have. Reading him with company inside the reading makes the task a little easier.

Glaucon and Adeimantus, whom Socrates mainly addresses in the *Republic*, sound like readers when they wonder how Socrates arrived at some point. He takes one little step after another, Adeimantus says, until the steps add up to a large implausible conclusion. Not much later Glaucon "laughably" speaks of Socrates' *daimonias huperbolês* "divine hyperbole."[1]

But then Glaucon and Adeimantus want to cooperate. Their objections presuppose their accompaniment in the *Republic*'s inquiries. And because they are not grand characters, these criticisms are tokens of resistance within their overall complaisance. Compare them to the characters who command our attention: Callicles in the *Gorgias*, fuming, grandiose; Alcibiades (as the *Symposium* portrays him) the impetuous aristocrat; Thrasymachus, canny but (in his way) also committed, Socrates' challenger in *Republic* Book 1.

Callicles for one is so far from accommodating that he withdraws from conversation altogether. Socrates has to give himself questions and answer them himself while Callicles sulks. And at one point before he stops talking Callicles pinpoints what he thinks has gone wrong. "You always say the same things." Callicles has grand politics in mind and men too strong to be shackled by humble folk's morality. But instead of language suited to magnificent revaluations of values, Socrates keeps coming back to examples about desire that is the desire for a large-sized cloak and big shoes.[2]

1 Plato *Republic* Book 6: Adeimantus, 487b1–c5; Glaucon, 509c1–2.

2 Plato *Gorgias*: Callicles withdraws from conversation, 505c–506a; "always the same things," 490e.

Modern readers hear Nietzsche in the speech of Callicles. I expect that Nietzsche heard Raskolnikov.[3] Nietzsche and Raskolnikov share with Callicles a taste for finer, higher, stronger language than Socratic philosophy has to offer. They want new laws fit for kings, to which alone a king would be answerable. Socrates hears "fit" and asks how a shoe should fit. Nietzsche deplores the crassness of theories about self-preservation that distort the will to power, sounding like Callicles who proposed the unconstraint of desires only to have Socrates ask about the desire in a *kinaidos*, submissive homosexual. Callicles answers that Socrates is a demagogue: "In contrast to this unappealing set of attributes in Socrates," Nancy Worman writes, "Callicles presents himself by implication as embodying the manly and gentlemanly style."[4]

Alcibiades in the *Symposium* has ambitions comparable to those admired by Callicles, and remarks on the same speech-effect that frustrated Callicles, Socratic humdrum about donkeys and shoemakers. "He always appears to be saying the same things about the same things."[5] But Alcibiades adds, as Callicles never would, that those who open up the *logoi* of Socrates – his "words, arguments, speeches, examples" – and look and enter into them, discover that those are the only words around that make sense. They are the most divine of all *logoi* and fullest in images of virtue, resembling Silenus figures that open to reveal a god inside.[6]

Alcibiades is still in love with Socrates. Callicles never could be. That difference would explain their discrepant responses to the words of Socrates; and Alcibiades' own image – figurines to be opened – implies that the merits of Socratic *logoi* manifest themselves to those who take the initiative and enter into the words that Socrates speaks. If you keep your distance as Callicles did, the plebeian examples will strike you as they struck him.

Another ambitious man from the dialogues suggests a third possibility. Shrewd Thrasymachus, more political operative than charismatic big man, hears shrewdness in Socrates. Socrates proposes that Thrasymachus teach him, and Thrasymachus laughs. "Here's that famous *eirôneia* of Socrates … I predicted to these people that you wouldn't want to answer. You would *eirôneusoio*."[7] Socrates is lying; dissembling; misrepresenting himself. He controls what his hearers understand him to be saying.

3 I enlarge this comparison in Pappas (2017a).

4 Socrates demagogue, Plato *Gorgias* 482c3–6, 494d1. See the discussion of their exchange in Worman (2008, 194–197). "In contrast to," Worman (2008, 196–197). On Nietzsche and self-preservation see *Beyond Good and Evil* sections 9, 13.

5 Plato *Symposium* 221e.

6 Plato *Symposium*: *logoi* of Socrates divine, 222a1–3; Silenus figures, 215b1–3.

7 Plato *Republic* 1.337a.

## Three ways of taking philosophy

The word that Thrasymachus uses, *eirôneia*, is cognate with the English "irony," and translators sometimes have Thrasymachus announce "the irony of Socrates." But the word communicated something harsher when Plato was writing. It had been "laundered and deodorized," as Gregory Vlastos says, by the time it appeared as *ironia* in Cicero's *De Oratore*.[8] In particular the word lost the implication of mockery that *eirôneia* carried in classical Greece.[9]

Deciding how to translate *eirôneia* will not settle how Thrasymachus sees Socrates, because Alcibiades and Callicles use the same word. Callicles says *eirôneuêi* "You're making fun of me," and Socrates throws the word back at him, "You were just making a lot of fun of me yourself," the accusation to each that he's ridiculing and belittling the other.[10] As for Alcibiades, when he says that Socrates spends his life *eirôneuomenos de kai paizôn* "fooling and toying" with people, he too might be referring to dissimulation and raillery. But Vlastos looks at this phrase together with what Alcibiades says a little later. Lying on the couch with him, Socrates had said, "in that ironical way that is so fully characteristic of him," that sex between them would be no good for Socrates.[11] The speech that follows displays the virtue that Alcibiades glimpsed in Socrates, if in an oblique way (as Vlastos also says) that demands attention and thought from the one who hears it.

It is a longstanding observation that modern readers misstate the Socratic effect by starting with a simplistic conception of irony, often enough making irony look like sarcasm.[12] But even a nuanced understanding of *eirôneia* falls short of telling how these interlocutors perceive what Socrates says. Is the *eirôneia* plain mockery as Callicles believes, in keeping with Socratic arguments plain and simple all round; or the occasion for a tenacious lover to find divine beauties within, as Alcibiades does; or is it the imposture that Thrasymachus suspects Socrates of? The *logoi* of Socrates always seem to reveal the *eirôneia* in them, but not in a single steady sense of that word.

Alcibiades makes a good stand-in for the enthusiastic reader. He catches the hint of beautiful profundity in philosophical discourse, even if he does not match his enthusiasm with perseverance. Callicles can't see anything in

8 Vlastos (1991, 28). The reference is to Cicero *De Oratore* 2.67. The entire chapter in Vlastos (1991, 21–44) informs my comments.

9 Mockery may be called a feature of *eirôneia* that disappeared on its way to becoming irony. This much has been agreed to; as Vlastos indicates, the modern examination of *eirôn* as term of abuse begins with Ribbeck (1876).

10 Socrates says, "You were just very much [*polla*] mocking me [*eirôneuou*]." The verb occurs twice at Plato *Gorgias* 489e1–3. On this point of translation, see Vlastos (1991, 25–26). On Socratic irony, also see Lane (2011); for a more complex analysis, see Nehamas (1998, 67–69).

11 Plato *Symposium*: Socrates *eirôneuomenos*, 216e4; Socrates speaks *eirônikôs*, 218d6–7.

12 What Booth (1974) calls "stable irony," which he treats as paradigmatic is particularly difficult to distinguish from sarcasm. What seems to me like genuine irony Booth labels "unstable irony" and sets aside as peripheral.

the subject, and fittingly foretells the jury's reaction to Socrates. His unresponsiveness to philosophy matches that of the jurors on whom the famed cross-examination had no effect. Callicles advises Socrates not to go on philosophizing in middle age – like lisping it is only cute when children do it – as if to signal that he only hears the sounds of what Socrates is saying.[13]

Because philosophy's enthusiasts hear worlds being created in the same words that less-sensitized listeners barely notice, a third audience, watchful and wary, will suspect that something else is going on. Thrasymachus reacts as if Socrates controlled what people saw in his *logoi*; as if Callicles and Alcibiades responded as differently to Socrates as they did because of something Socrates was doing.

Even if Thrasymachus is wrong to believe that philosophy speaks with deliberate concealment, his reaction begins in the right place, with the observation that philosophical language registers as needful one minute, pointless the next. Socratic *logoi* speak in everyday language of what exceeds the everyday. It is a commonplace about Plato – it is *the* commonplace about him – that his dialogues take on more than human language had thus far said. But speaking that way will often get admirers hearing everything in your words while a harder type hears only words spoken everywhere.

## "We consider ourselves friends …"

The imperative to say what might go unheard or be mistrusted can arise in hard times, and with the belief that human beings have debased their moral terminology. It arises that way in Thucydides, who was probably writing his history of the Peloponnesian War during the last part of Socrates' life. Thucydides and Socrates were about the same age and saw their city through the same crises; and Thucydides characterizes the moral chaos during one stretch of the war as a loss of words' meanings. Recklessness went by "courage." "Someone who agitated for the most extreme plans was always trustworthy. Anyone who opposed him was a man worth being suspicious of."[14]

Thucydides could almost be describing the bad company a young man falls in with, as Socrates imagines such company in the *Republic*. Corrupt friends slander any virtues a young man might have acquired. Temperance is now called effeminacy; being moderate about money makes you a hick. We find these friends also *hupokorizomenoi* "renaming" vicious traits so that they sound like virtues. Abusive arrogance is said to be good breeding, anarchy picks up the name "freedom," and shamelessness is courage.[15]

This part of the *Republic* associates the demonic thesaurus with a city's decline into democratic culture. Readers of Thucydides know how much he

13 Plato *Gorgias*, foretells jury's reaction, 486a–b; like lisping, 485c–d.

14 Thucydides *Peloponnesian War*: words lost the meanings they'd had, 3.82.3–5; "someone who agitated," 3.82.4.

15 Plato *Republic* Book 8: virtues given bad names, 560d; vices called by names of virtues, 560e.

blames democracy for, including the moral disorder that came to Athens.[16] But Socrates finds words failing in ways that Thucydides does not, in the absence of crisis or constitutional change. In a dialogue like the *Lysis*, it is not democratic culture that accounts for the conversation's failure to reach a definition for *philos* "friend." Socrates and two young friends go round in circles without capturing what they would like to say about friendship, and when the boys have to go home he calls after them: "We consider ourselves one another's friends – I put myself with the two of you – but we haven't been able to discover what the friend is."[17]

Socrates is cheerful but his words describe a doomed or damned condition. *Not knowing what a friend is* sounds like what you accuse a disloyal friend of. It means not being a friend. To make things worse, it will follow from this conversational failure that we can't say what a philosopher is either. If I can't say *philos* I can't say *philosophos* "friend of wisdom; of intelligence." Socrates is declaring defeat when no one else realizes a battle is on; shouting "Fire" in an empty theater. We call ourselves friends but we don't know what we're talking about.

Lysis and Menexenus are walking away escorted by their households' slaves. The slaves have been drinking and were non-Greek to begin with, so they speak with slurring foreign accents.[18] Socrates stands before them free Greek and sober, as if representing a return to sanity. But return from what? The moral chaos must have begun at birth, but not the birth of Lysis or even of Socrates. No constitutional crisis prevented Socrates and his friends from grasping the meaning of *philos*, unless you want to describe a crisis in how human beings are inherently constituted.

If the question for Thucydides is how to speak when your subject is a time you find morally unintelligible, Plato has that question before him too. But Plato also writes in response to a question that did not occupy Thucydides. What do you say, in which words and to whom, and with what purpose in mind, once human language has come to appear unintelligible to those who speak it? Aren't you bound to come out hard to read?

## Exceptional elements of experience

I identified the predicament and the Platonic response in broad terms. The world of experience appears in corrupted form. Human language can't contain a truth about friendship, and the language that attempts to will strike the candid respondent as *eirôneia* of uncertain variety, a misfiring communication.

Speaking in such broad terms we may seek to stabilize Platonic language as having other referents, as Aristotle does at one point distinguishing

16 On the role that resistance to democracy plays in both Thucydides and Plato, see Ober (2001).

17 Plato *Lysis* 223b4–6.

18 Plato *Lysis* 223a–b. On slavery and ethnicity in the *Lysis*, its athletic setting, and same-sex courtship, see Pappas (2017b).

Platonic from Socratic philosophies. Plato (he says) "interpreted [the Socratic definitions] as being about other things not what is perceived; for a common definition is impossible for perceived objects, given that they constantly change. He called such other beings Forms [*ideas*]."[19]

Once we mention *other beings* in Platonic philosophizing we soon reach the difficulties associated with the theory of Forms. This book has a narrower target in mind. The Forms, or the way they are understood, give Platonic metaphysics an otherworldly cast. Never perceived, distinct from perceptibles, perfectly exemplary, the Forms can seem to occupy a realm that never finds contact with the world before us.[20] Thus some of Aristotle's hardest challenges to Plato concern putative connections between the Forms and objects of experience. How does "the hot itself" make anything hot? Talk of patterns or "sharing" amounts to *metaphoras legein poiêtikas* "speaking in poetic metaphors."[21] Aristotle calls the Platonic explication of causation by Forms *kenologein* "empty talk, speaking in vain"; *dia kenês legomen* "we speak of nothing." Another work bids the *eidê* "Forms" goodbye as *teretismata* "twanging, twittering, chirping sounds," not words one needs to heed when explaining how things get their properties.[22] When Plato says *paradeigma* "pattern, paradigm," Aristotle objects that a pattern is normally something a maker consults when creating its likeness. Plato offers only the pattern without the pattern-follower whose constructive work lets the pattern function.[23]

My interest, in this book, lies not with beings so distinct from experience as to render their presence in experience a mystery, but with items that might read as responses to the degraded condition of experience and yet appear within experience. They have immanent status but they are to be understood with transcendent standards. The other world leaves its mark on this one with such exceptions. As non-Forms they avoid the challenge to the coherence of their engagement in the world. At the same time the effort to articulate them reveals something paradoxical and precarious in their natures.

One example appears in Plato's *Phaedo*, when Socrates diagnoses most courage as a variety of fear. The so-called brave submit to death "through fear of greater worse things," like the shame of running from combat. Nicely behaved people who display *sôphrosunê* "temperance, self-control" achieve some pleasures by denying themselves others.[24] What we see of virtues reveals them to be vices. Self-indulgence and fear belong to the nature of the human.

19 Aristotle *Metaphysics* I.6 987b5–8.

20 On what is called the "two-worlds" view of Platonism, especially as it seems to be stated in the middle books of the *Republic*, see Fine (2016, 1990, 1978).

21 Aristotle *Metaphysics* I.9 991a21–23. Also see comments on causation, 992a24–28. The same problem plagues the Pythagoreans, who said that number brings about change through "imitation." Plato did not escape the problem by changing his terminology, I.6 987b11–14.

22 Aristotle *Metaphysics* I.9: "empty talk," 991a21–22; "we speak of nothing," 992a26; "twanging etc.," *Posterior Analytics* I.22 83a33.

23 Aristotle *Metaphysics* I.9 991a23–24.

24 Plato *Phaedo*: ordinary courage, 68d3–6; ordinary self-control, 68e1–69a3.

Courage, justice, and the rest as they ordinarily present themselves resemble a *skiagraphia,* an illusionistic painting like the kind that the *Republic* accuses of manipulating cognitive faculties.[25]

Against this accusatory diagnosis of the human, the same passage offers as compensation if not remedy a virtue understood otherwise. The virtues grounded in philosophical wisdom begin with a desire for the afterlife that Socrates opposes to love of the body.[26] Philosophers learn how to disrespect their bodies' motive impulses. So they can act without either fleeing pain or chasing pleasure.

Some human actions now possess a miraculous character. Even though bodily existence renders most so-called virtues no better than their so-called contrary vices, there are specimens of virtues deserving that name. In those philosophical specimens the soul commands the body as it can do only after having achieved independence from it.[27] Where many people continue to value their bodies and bodies' joys even after dying, and become those unquiet ghosts that can be spotted hovering among tombs, philosophers prepare for death disvaluing their bodies while still alive. If not perfectly dislocated from their bodies, philosophers' souls achieve some measure of that separation.[28]

In its condition of greatest liberation, the philosopher's soul drives the body in the role of a being ontologically distinct from body, as Socrates says he once hoped he would find Anaxagoras declaring about mind and the universe. Socrates imagined a theory about earth and heaven created in the best possible way, when he heard about the mind (according to Anaxagoras) *diakosmôn* everything, of things' *kekosmêsthai* "being ordered, commanded" by mind.[29] These related verbs *kosmeô* and *diakosmeô* evoke a pleasing orderliness (as their root's appearances in "cosmos" and "cosmetic" imply), but also an order given in wartime. In the *Iliad* those verbs describe a commander's act of organizing troops and animals.[30] With such authority did Socrates picture mind setting the universe straight; with the same authority does a philosopher's soul direct a body.

25 Plato *Phaedo* 69b6; *Republic* 10.602d1–2.

26 Plato *Phaedo* 66b–68b.

27 Socrates says *contra* Anaxagoras that his bones and connective tissues would have fled Athens if left to themselves: Plato *Phaedo* 99a. The body can run itself when not controlled by the soul, though it will run itself in bodily ways.

28 Plato *Phaedo*: unquiet ghosts, visible because of absorption in bodily life, 81d; preparing for death, 64a–c. Socrates seems to be trying to describe the separation realistically. Philosophers *epitêdeuousin* "train" for dying, 64a4; turn away from the body *kath'hoson dunatai* "as much as they can," 64e4; loose their souls as other people do not (thus perhaps to greater degree than others even if not absolutely), 65a1.

29 Plato *Phaedo*: what Socrates expected from Anaxagoras, 97c–e; *nous* "mind" *diakosmôn* "ordering," 97c1; things' *kekosmêsthai*, 98a6. Unfairness in this argument: Sedley (2007, 86–88).

30 Homer *Iliad*: *kosmeô*, 2.554, 3.1, 14.379; *diakosmeô*, 2.476.

Truly brave and temperate actions thus occur in a body operated as if from a distance. It may have sounded like a rhetorical flourish when I spoke of some actions' "miraculous character." But really the genuine instances of courage and *sôphrosunê* occur when the body is haunted, working not under its own power but at the command of a soul that could be elsewhere. People think they've seen something remarkable when a ghost flutters near its tombstone; Socrates explains that those apparitions belong to those familiar things former thugs and drunkards; to prove the point, their souls will pass into the bodies of asses and like-minded creatures.[31] The really rare spectacle is not that of a ghost – reporting on such a sight would be like running to say "I saw a glutton!" – but the performance of a virtuous act, something truly uncanny, being a body commanded as if from beyond the grave.

No wonder Socrates refuses to give a straight answer when he is asked how he should be buried. If consistent with his identification of the human with its soul – therefore as something that can't be put in a grave – the reply also preempts admirers' fetishizing his grave, just as the belittlement of cemetery visions does. The philosopher Antisthenes, who was older than Plato, longer acquainted with Socrates, and present at his death, wrote of a stranger's life-altering visit to Socrates' grave. That report seems to have grown into a legend about Socrates' apparition in the visitor's dream.[32] For the *Phaedo* to neutralize such tales in advance reinforces its transformation of the marvelous exception. Philosophical virtue is claiming a new ontological status as exception to the nature of action, and specifically claiming the status that had been assigned to ghosts' doings.

Socrates' low estimation of the mundane interprets what is normal as corrupted or pathological. Against that version of the commonplace he sets an action both beyond the commonplace and still in it. Philosophical courage, for example the courage of Socrates, is an exception within experience. The need for such a virtue is demonstrated by the same universality of ignoble motive that would seem to render such virtue impossible.

The dialogues' philosophizing repeatedly seeks out items that can be spoken of in ordinary terms and yet exceed what such terms ordinarily refer to. These items differ from the intelligible objects in Platonic metaphysics; but if they have something less mysterious about them thanks to their engagement with the ordinary things about them, they nevertheless raise questions about philosophical language and reasoning that call for their own close interpretation and scrutiny.

31 Plato *Phaedo* 81d–e.

32 Plato *Phaedo*: Socrates on burial, 115c–d; Antisthenes, 59b8. Antisthenes reported to have written about the grave of Socrates in *Cyrsas or the Beloved* (Prince 2015, 302–306); on the tale as contrast with Plato's Socrates, see Luz (2019, 144–145).

***Love, city, philosophers***

This book covers dialogues not always studied together: *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Ion*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*. I find these dialogues exerting themselves to capture the exceptional within experience. With *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* we consider what *erôs* needs to become and might be; with the *Republic*, how a better *polis* "city" might exist among known cities; with *Ion* and the rest, what a true and officially designated *philosophos* could be, and what place in the world such people might live in.

There are after all more things in philosophy than are dreamt of in your heaven and earth. But how do Plato's conversations theorize these more-than-natural things in the language we use for the loves, cities, and philosophers that exist around us? How does the worse imagine the better? (Do we only dream of stars as guttering lights above?) I ask these not as rhetorical questions but wanting to follow the dialogues' logic and strategies.

Given for example the origins of erotic desire, often in our crudest natures, how can we understand a love that is appropriate to philosophers and aimed at better objects? Does some part of the body belong apart from bodies in a realm to be recognized as divine? Can we call the eye or head, or even up to half the body, divine? The idea of an exceptional item in experience becomes literal here, with the possibility that a mortal body might contain a godly body part (god-kissing carrion) and connect itself to a better love through that part.

Regarding cities, and given the mongrel character of human governance – natural, inevitable, safeguard to civilization; yet also a conspiracy to serve one faction rather than the whole public; petty; mercenary – how could a faulty existing constitution become the sound variety? Indeed, how can the world in which constitutions are fated to be faulty ever contain one that is not? Can we overhear the beginnings of a better city in what other commentators on politics have said, or must we oversee its founding with superior powers of vision as yet unknown?

And can a new founding be done *the right way*? Plato knew that cities could be taken over and their constitutions transformed. Takeovers happened all the time and led to tyranny. The *Republic* declares tyranny to lie at the furthest opposite extreme from the constitution Plato envisions; and yet when it sets out to describe the new order's moment of coming into existence, the new order threatens to collapse back into the establishment of tyranny. Sadly the words for establishing justice are the words that before now have established injustice.

Given the spontaneity that philosophy calls for, given its oddness in existing society, given the impossible means by which it has sought to reproduce itself; given the pretenders to philosophy's throne, but also more daunting the ages and nations that never philosophized, one wonders: How can philosophers be in the world? And by this "How" I mean to ask both: *Is it* in fact possible for philosophers to exist in the known world? – and also: According to what

manner and in what fashion do they exist? In one respect they might make sense as outsiders to society. But then there is no process available for making new philosophers, not to mention no home for them to occupy.

## Methods and strategies

It is easy to ridicule the Platonic reach, and easy things are done often. Even a philosopher as disinclined to mockery as Kant can't resist picturing Plato as a soaring bird. This magnificent flying animal imagined that it might fly still higher if it only climbed up out of the air its wings were beating against, not recognizing that what resisted its flight also made flight possible.[33]

Kant criticizes Plato with sympathy. His image itself is sympathetic in its implication that the entry into metaphysics does not consist in a determinative step. A bird rising through the atmosphere will pass imperceptibly into air slightly thinner, maybe thin enough to glide through faster, before reaching air that is too thin to rest on. And you might see the Platonic ambition that this book dwells on as the similarly gradated higher manifestation of something that happens in human life as commonly as flight in a bird, namely the act of marking a place, time, word, person, or portable object as distinct from all others. (Jacob called the name of the place Peniel.[34]) When does Platonic marking exceed what everyone has been doing? Is it when a part of the body is declared not merely superior but divine? – when the philosopher is identified as belonging to a different order? – when the day comes to convert a city into one that at last deserves the name "good"?

Because they are found among ordinary samples of their kind, exceptional phenomena can engage with the objects of experience, not just through empty metaphors. The philosopher spoken of in the *Phaedo* who manifests courage unmixed with fear appears among other people and their adulterated courage, often facing the same dangers they do. Likewise the love, city, and philosopher this book describes are going to be situated among the typical varieties. An exceptional love will still draw one person to the company of another, even passing for the sorry attractedness already known by that name. The new city makes deals with unjust cities around it and fights wars against them. The personification of wisdom has ignorant neighbors or faces pretenders to philosophy in court – maybe not successfully, but also not in a way you would call logically ridiculous.

If anything the challenge to the dialogues lies in the demand that they verbalize what makes these phenomena exceptional. As Socrates might have put the point in the *Phaedo*, his trouble arises not when saying that the hot itself makes something hot, but in showing how that which makes something hot,

33 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction, p. A5=B9.
34 Genesis 32.30.

which is to say fire, stands in a special relationship to the hot itself.[35] Just when does the object become more than it had been – the fire also specially related to heat? When Socrates contrasts the governance-by-mind that he wanted to hear about from Anaxagoras with the mere necessary conditions for events that Anaxagoras actually delivered, he makes much of *kosmeô* and *diakosmeô*. These verbs' past uses on the battlefield create an expectation about command that will not be satisfied by necessary conditions working together to cause an action. "No other man on earth," says Homer about Menestheus, "could match him at ordering [*kosmêsai*] horses and shielded men"; and the familiarity of that language for characterizing troops around Troy might distract from the surprise in its new use, which is the surprise that soul might keep body in line as if as a separate personage.[36]

The metaphysical often lies close to the natural or worldly. And just as Kant's Plato-bird might not be able to specify when it ran out of air to rest on, Plato's reader might not spot when an object in his dialogues takes on an exceptional quality not found in others of its kind. Maybe this is why some philosophers compare their treatment of philosophy to therapy, because therapy implies there is no cure, and a cure would need to be able to mark the difference in advance between normal ways of speaking and the philosophical departures from them.[37] Discovering that a political establishment differs from all others can call for a sharp eye for what is said about the others, and under what circumstances.

For example a reader has to dig, as scholars have done in recent generations, into "the literary and cultural contexts from which Plato drew his vocabulary and against which he developed it."[38] This book investigates those contexts sometimes to identify what Plato's speakers say as a statement at home in the language and ideas of Plato's Athens, sometimes to flag their statements as departures from what was said and could be said. The linguistic, political, religious, and social contexts help on the one hand to indicate the difference between the ordinary and the metaphysical, on the other hand to reveal where the existing language and practices reassert themselves – to put it less obscurely, where on the one hand a dialogue characterizes a phenomenon as exceptional, and on the other hand where it fails to spell out the wished-for exceptionality.

At times ancient poetry does the most to elucidate the meanings in Plato's words: Homer and Hesiod from the archaic past, Attic tragedy and comedy from the Athens of his time, and the generations just before his

35 Plato *Phaedo* 96a–105d, investigates causation with such questions in mind. A large and instructive literature has sought to elucidate this passage: Vlastos (1969); Bolton (1998); Sharma (2009).

36 Fire and the hot itself, Plato *Phaedo* 103d; Menestheus ordering horses and men, Homer *Iliad* 2.553–554.

37 This sentence is indebted to conversations with David Rigsbee.

38 Herrmann (2013, 290).

own. Sometimes other philosophers amplify the context: Chapter 8 draws on Aristotle's student Palaephatus. Sometimes Herodotus and Thucydides amplify the historical backdrop to a dialogue.

The readings undertaken in the chapters ahead bring this general approach to the topics of love, city, and philosopher. Part I looks at Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* together to clarify the challenge that Plato faces in imagining good love in a world whose loves have only been depraved. A better city then could have taken the discussion to Plato's *Laws*, among other dialogues; I find it sufficiently industrious to confine myself to the *Republic*, in the chapters of Part II. The move from constitutions as they perforce have been thus far to a constitution whose citizens will see it as it will have been – maybe also inevitably, as it must have been – has not yet been told of in the authors Socrates brings into his argument: Homer, Hesiod, Herodotus, Aristophanes. That those background voices fail to comprehend the good city heightens what is astonishing about the *Republic*'s exceptional politics, but also imperils the dialogue's articulation of a better civic order.

This book's last section begins with Plato's *Ion* and proceeds to the trilogy *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*. I understand those works to be asking, along with their other questions, what makes an official philosopher possible, or a philosophical school. The *Ion* serves (as other dialogues also might have served) to depict the pretenses to wisdom and would-be instruction that make the philosopher necessary as their correction.

My purpose, in tracking down a recurrent narrative or logic of the Platonic exception, is to do justice to the energy that motivates the dialogues I read. Platonic writing is after all still susceptible to being experienced as pedestrian by a reader like Callicles; as winged, in the eyes of an Alcibiades; and because of those two possibilities, therefore also to be read as performing trick jumps, as a canny Thrasymachus might say. If there is room for a reaction different from all of those, call it an appreciation of the way the philosophical writing moves, but without suspicion of it, then I hope that my reader on one side and the readings ahead enjoy moving beyond this introduction to become better acquainted.

## Remark on interpretation

I do not see myself establishing an interpretive method before beginning to read. But some ways of responding to Plato have come in for so much debate that it might help for me to round out my introduction with a pair of negative remarks: what I will *not* mean by interpretation in this book. These remarks are not meant as criticisms of other readers' strategies, but they should give the reader some idea what to expect.

First, I do not take the interpretation of Plato's dialogues to bear a necessary relationship to the discovery of (or statements about) Plato's intentions in writing. We *can* read for an author's intention and very often do. The

arguments that declare intentions unknowable have been set aside by now and for good reasons. Only it does not follow that because we *can* and commonly do look for an intention, we therefore *must* look for one or always necessarily do so when reading. Thrasymachus acts as though the point is always to figure out who really means what, but Thrasymachus does not have to be the reader's only model. It is possible to examine a piece of writing in search of what the author does not say, fails to realize, or fears saying.[39] At some points especially I will bring out argumentative strategies in the Platonic dialogues without claiming them to be Plato's intended strategies, in fact suspecting them unintended.

Sometimes it is said to be more respectful to an author to ask what the author intends, and more respectful to ascribe what one finds in reading to its author. But even assuming that we should always be respectful (not a bad rule), there is no need to think that authors and their intentions are the only things deserving respect. Several of Plato's dialogues point toward an alternative. In brief or at length, the *Apology*, *Ion*, *Meno*, and *Phaedrus* associate poetic excellence with a divine or natural cause, often *enthousiasmos* "inspiration, possession."[40] A poet writing when inspired will produce something of which that same poet was otherwise incapable. And the dominant presenting effect or sign of this possessed state is that the poet can't say much of value about the poem. Socrates observes in the *Apology* that third parties did better than the authors of wise poems at explicating the wisdom in them.

If the theory were true, one would have cause to extrapolate from and interrogate a written work without regard for its author's intention (and again, not because that intention can't be found, but because it need not be pursued and might not help). The warrant for one's scrutiny would come from the fact that the piece was inspired. And it seems to me that such scrutiny could be recognized as respectful even when it slights or passes over authorial intentions.

The question is not whether I believe that Plato's dialogues could be inspired writings. The question is whether Plato believed that they might be. Socrates credits divine forces for his speech on love in the *Phaedrus*, and includes philosophy among the great effects of divine madness. Alcibiades calling the *logoi* of Socrates divine seems to mean something similar. Even in the dialogue Socrates is absent from, its often stern and serious main speaker looks back

39 The *locus classicus* for arguments against intention is Wimsatt and Beardsley (1954). Against their position see Cavell (2015). For the claim that all reading necessarily reads for intention see Knapp and Michaels (1982). Their view is criticized in Moi (2017, 129–137). I speak of intentions that may but need not be pursued in Pappas (1989).

40 Plato *Apology* 22a–c; *Ion* 533d–535a; *Meno* 99c–d; *Phaedrus* 245a–b. On *enthousiasmos*, see above all Murray (1981); also Tigerstedt (1970); Partee (1971); Woodruff (1982); Ledbetter (2003, 87–94).

on the conversation as the product of divine *epipnoia* "inspiration," in its way a poem.[41]

So an investigation that reaches a point at which external voices in the *Republic*'s conversation are warning of a tyranny indiscernible from the rule by philosophers, does not have to connect that conclusion to Plato saying, "This is what he wants us to see." If it reads more naturally as a frustration of Plato's wish to define a possible good city than as the expression of his more secret wish to subvert such political plans, we can take it that way – and then, if it helps, you may reflect that Plato would accept the frustration of his political fantasy at the hands of the Muses.

## Second remark on interpretation

Finally I resist some types of claims made about Plato the "dramatist" and ways of reading him that are taken to follow from those claims. *Drama* means many things, and declining to attribute it to Plato's writings might sound like denying the artistry in Plato's writings, or his dialogues' subtlety and indirectness. It is better to focus on structural features of the dialogues to make the point clear. For example they contain many voices. Plato himself has no speaking parts; in this respect his dialogues differ from Xenophon's, with their authorial intrusions, and from the earlier pieces by Antisthenes (to the extent we can reconstruct those) that also seem to include summative comments.[42] Given the characters' presence and author's absence, as one version of this position goes, every speaker's claims need to be read with reference to that speaker's background and situation. When Socrates addresses a claim, his argument should be seen as what aids that interlocutor (given background, situation, and other beliefs). Thus we separate what Socrates says about the soul, in Plato's *Phaedo*, to the anxious friends awaiting his death, from what may be a distinct thing, the view of the soul and its living held by Plato, who we are told had been absent from that scene.[43]

As the dialogue that announces Plato's absence, the *Phaedo* can serve as a good example of the dialogues' drama. As tragedies had three actors, it

41 Plato: Socrates inspired, *Phaedrus* 241e (and cf. *Lysis* 216d); philosophy generally, *Phaedrus* 248d; conversation like poem, *Laws* 7.811c; issues in dialogues like the one we're reading, 811d. I am grateful to Kemal Batak for this reminder and for our exchange on the subject.

42 On this relevant structural feature of the dialogues by Antisthenes, a feature that implies a broader range of possibilities for the Socratic genre, see Luz (2019, 135–136).

43 With an example so abbreviated I am leaving out many ably defended views. The best place to begin is Press (2000); I know of no better discussion of that book than Ferrari (2000). I take my examples to expand on what Ferrari calls "dramatic" works. I respond to another version of the "dramatic" reading of Plato in Pappas (2011). On attention to individual characters as literary see Nussbaum (1979, 154, 160). More specifically on the approach according to which Socrates tells interlocutors what they need to hear, see Kamtekar (2019). As Kamtekar says, "we make an interpretive mistake when we diagnose away these positions [introduced by interlocutors] as mere products of certain psychological conditions."

features three principal speakers: Cebes and Simmias joust with Socrates over arguments for the soul's immortality. Their back-and-forth calls to mind the conflicts between characters in a tragedy. The *Phaedo* also takes place over the length of a day, as Aristotle says tragedies do, and it ends as many tragedies did with a death.[44]

Plato's dialogues frequently put three people together to philosophize. The bulk of the *Republic* features Glaucon and Adeimantus talking to Socrates, sometimes one of them pressing a point and sometimes the other. But with Cebes and Simmias the *Phaedo* stylizes the three-speaker interplay. Socrates makes an argument for immortality that is challenged by one of them, then a fresh argument challenged by the other, and then an argument that both of them join in challenging.

Compare Plato's use of three speakers reminiscent of tragedy to a scene from Greek tragedy that exploited its three actors. Sophocles was credited with adding the third actor; he certainly composed scenes that showed what could be done with three.[45] A messenger comes to a pair of other characters with news that inspires opposite reactions. In *Electra* the messenger is Orestes' tutor, arriving before Clytemnestra and Electra with misinformation the audience has heard him plan to tell. Neither woman has seen Orestes in years and the tutor lies that he was killed in a chariot race. Despite grieving for the son she bore, Clytemnestra feels released from her fear of being killed by him in reprisal for her having murdered Agamemnon. Besides grieving for her beloved brother, Electra despairs of ever seeing her father's murder avenged.[46]

The scene keeps its spectators alert to the difference between what they know and what the principal characters know. That difference is almost always at work in ancient tragedy, if only because audiences knew the plays' stories before they saw them performed. Sometimes a prologue also filled in the plot. In the *Electra* the audience knows what the arriving third person will

44 Plato's name appears twice in the dialogues, in the *Apology* to state that he was present at Socrates' trial and joined in guaranteeing a payment (38b); in the *Phaedo* whose narrator concludes his list of those present at the death of Socrates, "I believe that Plato was ill" (59b10). This sentence is naturally taken to mean that Plato was too sick to attend, though logically it could mean: "Now that I think of it, Plato was there too, sitting in the corner coughing the whole time." See Aristotle *Poetics* 5 1449b13, for the observation that ancient plays covered the events of one "cycling of the sun." Martha Nussbaum explores the comparison between tragedy and the *Phaedo* (1986, 122–135). Most of our conclusions about how to read a dialogue are the same, but we contrast the dialogues with tragedies along different lines.

45 See Aristotle *Poetics* 4 1449a16–19; Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 3.56 and Suda *s.v.* "Sophocles." On rival ancient testimony and discussion, see Else (1945) and Knox (1972).

46 Sophocles *Electra* 660–790. A scene with nearly parallel structure appears in Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus* 955–1070. A messenger tells Oedipus that the king and queen of Corinth were not his parents. Oedipus thinks he no longer needs to fear his prophesied fate; Jocasta begins to fear the prophecy has been fulfilled.

say, and knows that the news is false. Hearing about the lie reminds them of their place outside the tragedy, thus of the tragedy's status as drama.

Where its characters are concerned, a tragic drama brings forward opposition between them that permits no ordinary resolution. The dramatic difficulty, which is the reenactment of human difficulty, begins with personages set in irreconcilable situations, therefore reading inimical implications in a single fact. The third actor enhances this characteristic of drama along with others. Two characters might exchange lines of dialogue that move toward a stalemate.[47] But the scene that Sophocles builds with his third character does not so much finish a discussion as it shows why there is nothing to discuss. For Clytemnestra a world without Orestes means peace. Electra understands herself to occupy a world in which she will never see justice, let alone peace. Tragedies end in death when they do because nothing else will undo the opposition in them. Either Clytemnestra is destroyed or Electra is.

Finally, the drama in the *Electra* scene emerges from its audience's knowing that the old tutor is lying. They are freed from figuring out the import of Orestes' death, because the story of his death isn't even true within the dramatic world. They focus their attention on how the two who believe the story react to hearing it.

The possibility of spectators' responding this way is what Plato's *Laws* finds undesirable about drama. Playwrights composing under the Muses' influence "necessarily make people set against one another." In such situations the playwright "must say many contradicting things, and doesn't know whether these or the other things said [in the play] are true."[48] The reproach does not require dramatists to be ignorant, but their ignorance explains why plays issue no direct statement. The audience hears "A" from one character, "not-A" from another, and both sound right, as it sounds fitting and true to *Electra*'s audience that Clytemnestra has her mind eased when Electra has her hopes crushed.

Just because the *Laws* regrets unsupervised standoffs in drama does not logically imply that Plato's dialogues are free of that effect; but in fact nothing like the *Electra*'s type of drama appears in Plato. This is not because the dialogues fail to attain dramatic difficulty, but because philosophical conversation wants no such difficulty in it. Even when arguments fail to convince, the dialogues move forward in the hopes that an argument or theory may prevail. The *Phaedo* posits this hope when yet another proposal about immortality founders, and Socrates urges Phaedo not to succumb to "misology," the mistrust of argument.[49]

It follows from the dialogues' not admitting tragic opposition that death does not appear in them as necessary. Socrates dies in the *Phaedo*, but the point

47 Thus Antigone finally tells Ismene: "Fix your own fate," Sophocles, *Antigone* 78–84; Jason to Medea: "I will not dispute [*ou krinoumai*] any more," Euripides *Medea* 522–609.

48 Plato *Laws* 4.719c–d.

49 Plato *Phaedo* 89b–90e.

is that he did not have to. Thus Xenophon reports the friend Apollodorus pained that Socrates should die unjustly, and the smiling reply from Socrates, "Would you rather see me die justly or unjustly?"[50]

It is also true in another way that "Socrates does not have to die," that is that drinking the hemlock might not be the end of him, as long as bodily death does not take the soul out of existence. If anything the hemlock has cured the illness that is bodily existence.[51] Within the *Phaedo*, the only irrefutable claim that death destroys something of value comes from Xanthippe: "Socrates, this is the last time your associates will be talking to you and you to them." Socrates orders his wife taken home. The laments from Cebes and Phaedo express their own coming loss, but Xanthippe has identified a bodily activity whose value Socrates can't deny. He really will not be philosophizing again, and so the dialogue that permits all other objections removes her insight. This shall not be a tragedy.[52] There is no situation here that requires death for its resolution, nor any situation that can be resolved by means of a death.

The dialogue won't have a spectator set at a distance to appraise the scene as drama and the characters' reactions as reflections of their places in the story. The reader knows about immortality what Socrates and his friends know. And we don't have to speculate on the spectator's position, because the *Phaedo* depicts its own spectator in the person of Echecrates, somewhat as other dialogues contain a Callicles or an Alcibiades to illustrate what people hear when Socrates speaks. Echecrates appears in the Phaedo's opening frame, with occasional reentries, and hears the story of the last day of Socrates far from Athens and some time after it occurred. He hears what anyone else would hear from having the *Phaedo* read aloud.[53]

Echecrates repeatedly denies the distinction between the present and the absent. Phaedo had been there for the last day of Socrates and now loves to hear about it; Echecrates says that he and the unnamed others listening with him have the same interest. Later he interjects when Phaedo recalls fatal criticisms to an argument everyone had been previously persuaded by. The two men objecting "had confused us again and plunged us into doubt," and Echecrates sympathizes – has *suggnômên* literally "the same opinion" – having felt as deflated to hear those objections now as Phaedo had years before. Then the tide turns. Socrates begins a fresh argument; explains a premise; and Echecrates cuts in, "To me it seems that what he said was wondrously clear."

50 Xenophon *Apology* 28.

51 On the standard reading of Socrates' last words "We owe a cock to Asclepius," he has recovered from the disease of being alive: Plato *Phaedo* 118a7–8. For a different interpretation, persuasively argued, see Kanayama (2019).

52 Plato *Phaedo*: Xanthippe's lament, 60a5–7; Cebes, "Where will we get a good charmer for our fears now," 78a1–2; Phaedo on his own weeping, "not crying for him but for my own bad luck at being deprived of such a companion," 117c8–d1. Timothy Gould pointed out to me the truth in what Xanthippe says.

53 Plato *Phaedo* 57a–b. The *Theaetetus* carries this invention of a reader further, with characters who hear the *Theaetetus* as written dialogue read aloud.

Phaedo: "It seemed that way to everyone present." Echecrates (driving the point home): "And to us who were absent hearing it now."[54] The objections that sowed doubt inside the scene in the presence of Socrates sow the same doubt years later, and the premises understood clearly then are understood clearly again to someone hearing the words at a distance. Philosophy understands itself as having no spectators.

They're just two examples, the *Electra* and the *Phaedo*, except that the scene with Clytemnestra uses its three actors to unmistakably dramatic effect; and the *Phaedo* as set and scened and played, and with its death ending, makes as good a case as the dialogues do for status as drama. And in how the characters stand relative to one another, where they position their audiences, and what the audience reflects on in the action, the two works seem to me to define a great divide between dialogue and drama. I agree as everyone must that the dialogues are complex and can be sly and in their way subversive. But in the sense of "drama" that Plato would have understood, they neither are nor were made to be dramatic.

I introduced these remarks on interpretation as negative, but even a discussion begun with negative conclusion in mind should reveal something substantive if it can. The resistance to drama as described here shows me that Plato takes human beings at large, not only brilliant or legendary figures, to care that erotic love is best described as incest, that politics as practices (and even more so politics as reformed) tends toward tyranny, and that the usual purveyors of wisdom are sophists and their fraudulent kinfolk. Glaucon speaking in the *Republic* fears tyranny as a constant potentiality in human affairs, but the *Republic*'s readers also do, and so do I. And insofar as these diagnoses of the world concern everyone, it will be everyone who hopes the same world might contain exceptions: constitutions that administer justice, a philosopher who lives among humans yet resembles gods, erotic desire that feels like the old motive impulse but can reach heaven. The deplorable condition of experience, if you follow Plato in finding it deplorable, stokes the wish for an exception, even if the paradox of exceptional standing within an existence so thoroughly diagnosed exerts ponderous pressure on the words with which the dialogues seek to describe such exceptions.

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54 Plato *Phaedo*: those listening love hearing, 58d7–9; confusion after objections and same response from Echecrates, 88c–d; wondrously clear explanation, as also for those present and again for those absent, 102a2–6.

*New Clothes*. It has been transmogrified. A version of Chapter 8 was written for a workshop on Plato's *Sophist* at Seattle University and subsequently appeared, with other papers from that workshop, in *New Yearbook for Phenomenology*. The precursor to Chapter 9, which was written for a workshop on Plato's *Statesman* at Boston College, appeared with other papers from that workshop in a collection edited by John Sallis.[55]

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# Part I

# Why love must be good

## Kinds of *erôs* in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*

### Love's gains and losses

"Platonic" relationships called by that name today take away the sex and often the courtship and romance. I do not say this to sermonize about how much is forgotten when an ancient name survives to the present. The Adam's apple and Achilles tendon too (to name only homey parts of life) barely touch Adam and Achilles. And this "Platonic" is not entirely wrong. In the two Platonic dialogues, *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, that dwell on the nature of *erôs*, Socrates does advocate a love forswearing sexual expression. It is said that he lives by his principle. Alcibiades recalls the time he lay under the same blanket with Socrates and yet – as one puts it today – *nothing happened.*

Describing the absence of sexual activity as "nothing" pinpoints the respect in which one misuses Plato's name in applying it to abstemious relations. That description begins with what is left out or lost, whereas the point of what Socrates has to say about the love he celebrates is that it gains and does not only lose in taking place without sex. Whether relaying what he says Diotima taught him (in the *Symposium*), or (as he claims to be doing in the *Phaedrus*) winging it, speaking off the top of his head; either way Socrates offers theoretical knowledge, virtue, and love's driving power, all not only together in Platonic love but also together necessarily. Moreover, they occur together *because* not accompanied by sexual activity.

In the *Symposium* Diotima pictures an avid lover's devaluing good looks after having glimpsed the greater beauty that resides in souls, let alone the still greater beauty in knowledge. Such lovers "abstain" from sex only in the sense that people who eat grapes abstain from eating their seeds, skipping the lesser pleasure when they have come to know a greater one.

In the *Phaedrus* Socrates portrays something more like a couple's reciprocal affection and demands something more like abstinence. This time sexual activity continues to be valued by the lovers but they deny themselves the pleasure for their souls' sake. Again the fruits of philosophical love include those objects of knowledge we call Platonic Forms. During a life spent in a body, erotic desire without sexual gratification lets the soul focus on the experience that one had (together with one's lover) in the prenatal condition

in heaven. Beyond this lifetime's limits, the myth promises a shortcut back to heavenly existence and direct contemplation of Forms, a mere three incarnations before returning to divine company – not the complete round of ten that have to be endured by those less continent. Without bodily pleasure getting in the way, *everything* can happen.

## Romance and the heart's desiring

Against visions of the highest reality and gratification for your soul, what does ordinary love have to offer? But it's hard to know where to begin answering that question when human beings have been describing desirous love for about as long as they've described anything.

If we limit the question to Plato's writings, I believe that the best spokesman for intense and satisfying bodily love is the *Symposium*'s character Aristophanes, a figure we know from outside Plato as the author of classical comedies. More than the wily seducer Lysias in Plato's *Phaedrus* and more than his fellow *Symposium* diners, Aristophanes sets out to capture the breathless intensity and the exclusivity of the condition called falling in love, along with – something not to be neglected – the desire for bodily union. "This is the one for me." "It's as if we've always known each other."

Aristophanes spins a yarn about double-backed beasts in a long-past mythic time, cloven by punitive gods and condemned to spend their lives seeking their lost other halves. The myth transforms what we would otherwise call personal preference into the perception of an actual past relation. This is the one for you because this is part of your body; it's as if you have always known each other for the reason that you once did. And not only epistemologically significant, *erôs* now also has metaphysical value. It turns those in love into what they had been originally, when they made sense as entities; almost as if you had been the spark plug that walked alone, but now – ensconced in the mechanism you'd been built for – you can operate according to your true nature.

Comic heroes who work to keep their dignity sometimes radiate sadness (Buster Keaton, Richard Pryor), and the people of Aristophanes' story have that sadness in them. His story charms everyone on a first reading, but it sinks in later that if this story is true you will never rediscover Ms or Mr Right. Human beings possess no method for tracking down their lost birth companions nor even signs that will prove they've been happened upon. A method implies a generalization. And if Aristophanes has described *erôs* correctly, the one thing lovers will not be able to do is generalize, or otherwise look beyond the special case of themselves. For Aristophanes, and I would say, for sexuality as Plato thinks we have thus far understood it, one never advances beyond bodily self-concern.

In Chapter 1 I propose that Aristophanes' story is an allegory for sexual relations between parent and child, hence rendering all love incestuous. Even if this reading sounds novel, it does not deny or undermine but intensifies what readers usually discover in the story: That it makes a happy reunion of

lovers impossible; that it arrests love in an infantile, self-loving condition; that it defines love without need of transcendence. The psychoanalytic sense to the story repeats its moral. If you love without divinity; if your heaven amounts to no more than a high place that humans can climb up to (as they more or less do in some plays of the real-life Aristophanes); then the best your love can aspire to is the strongest urge a godless world has available to it, which is the rejuvenating, primordial, absolutely lawless urge to incest.

It follows that it is already too late to get people worried about corruption of the youth, as the real Aristophanes apparently got Athenians worrying with his depiction of Socrates. In the world they have been born into, desirous love has gone as bad as it can go. Where *erôs* is concerned the world of experience is uniformly corrupted.

## Replies to the Aristophanic challenge

The *Symposium*'s Diotima, as Socrates replays her philosophy, treats Aristophanes more than any of the other speakers as the one to be rebutted. To ward off the atrocious love he portrays, she articulates an antipodal *erôs* through which we start out loving human beings in the usual way, but rise above that lowly enterprise to love ever more exalted intellectual beauties.

Diotima's *erôs* improves life. It eliminates the pettiness in Aristophanic love, not to mention the impossibility of love as Aristophanes pictured it. On her account desire leads to higher things, beyond self-desiring and above human concerns in general. This is the respect in which Platonic love makes everything happen.

But the *erôs* that Socrates promotes in the *Symposium* also has to post a loss when measured against the *erôs* of Aristophanes. By having this yearning bring a lover into new philosophical territories, Diotima winds up with an *erôs* that might for all we know be natural *to* human beings, and yet is not native *in* them. No longer uncivilized, *erôs* is also no longer restorative. The condition of being in love does not return you to your original state but rather exists to remove you from that state.

Do we have to choose one or the other? Can there be a love that restores the lover's first state of being and yet achieves an elevated philosophical condition? *That* would answer the challenge that Aristophanes poses. For to the extent that Aristophanes has glimpsed something true about love, we can verbalize his challenge as the demand to show what is true about love while also promising that something good can come of it, for the reason or in consideration of the fact that love comes of something good. The *Symposium* leaves us in a worry that we can either recover what we already recognize ourselves to be or achieve a new elevated condition, but not both.

The great speech that Socrates delivers in Plato's *Phaedrus* aims to describe a love both recuperative and divine, depicting a *nostos* "homecoming" that returns the soul to thoughts of the heaven it belongs in. As other readers do (though not all of them) I take Plato to have written the *Phaedrus* after

the *Symposium*, and to have written it in part to improve upon Diotima's theory of *erôs*. The myth in the *Phaedrus* permits love to mean "This is what you really are and where you'd been," only departing from what we now call experience inasmuch as bodily existence has dulled the memory of what experience once had been.

Love in the *Phaedrus* reunites companions from the disembodied days in which they rode their chariots together around heaven. When one feels the right *erôs*, which is the kind caused by divine possession, lovers can claim everything that was true about Aristophanic love yet hope for everything that is good in the love that Diotima spoke of. The right kind of love now both restores and improves.

All we need to make the *Phaedrus*'s solution work is proof that *erôs* is divine. Divinity solves the problem of bodily love only when divinity differs from what already exists among bodies. Socrates calls the *erôs* he endorses "right-hand" love, to set it apart from the ordinary gauche variety of being love-crazed. But then the *Phaedrus* finds ways to question this directional distinction, leaving its progress beyond the *Symposium* in jeopardy. Indeed we wonder whether any dividing line within the body's world can represent the line that sets that world as a whole apart from the divine world as a whole. The salvational *erôs* that breaks the depressing rule of earthly *erôs* threatens to be inconceivably exceptional.

# 1 Congenital love

## Aristophanic *erôs* in the *Symposium*

Erotic exceptionalism in Plato develops in a pair of his dialogues taken together, the *Symposium* followed by the *Phaedrus*, with one seen as offering an answer to the other, or offering relief from the danger that the other never fully dispels.[1]

The most impassioned and romantic accounts of *erôs* in the two works share an elemental claim. Love returns those in love to their true natures and original selves. In one case the elemental claim threatens to make all *erôs* intolerable, while in the other the return to one's nature means that lucky lovers are feeling something divine.

The *Phaedrus* attributes the claim of loving return to Socrates, as part of his grandiloquent great speech about love; in the *Symposium*, *erôs* as re-creation of original self comes from Aristophanes, by reputation master of the forbidden thought, historically an antagonist to Socrates, and here the main opponent against whom Socrates proposes the account of love he's been taught. Both speakers draw on mythic language to describe a putative better nature that lovers once possessed. Loving (according to both) means recognizing that you were something more than you are, and seems to promise once more becoming what you had been.

The pairing of *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* with the common element in their most enticing speeches makes for a good first example of the narrative or logical arc this book is about, containing both an overpowering universal wretched diagnosis of the known world, and the chance for an exemption from that diagnosis. On Aristophanes' view the restoration of original human

1 I brought together this chapter's ideas in November 2015, at a seminar at Boston College as part of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy. In addition to Gary Gurtler, I thank Deborah De Chiara-Quenzer, Marina McCoy, and David Ellis for their contributions. In spring 2015 I attended David Sider's seminar on the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* at NYU. I am indebted to him and to Nicholas Rynearson, who also attended, for many insights into the *Symposium.* Conversations with Timothy Gould, Burt Hopkins, David Mikics, and Dennis Schmidt encouraged me to pursue these thoughts and offered suggestions about how to present them.

nature implies a low and appalling outcome; the *Phaedrus*'s Socrates turns it into something elevated and even godly.

## First *Symposium* then *Phaedrus*

This chapter will look at the *Symposium*, the next at the *Phaedrus*, as respectively the statement of a problem and an offered solution. On this account the *Symposium* presents love as the return to one's original nature but presents that hope in dangerous and unacceptable form. Socrates answers that story with the teaching about love that he attributes to Diotima. Diotima's alternative frees us from having to accept an antisocial *erôs*; but in the process she also jettisons the thought that love is restorative. The *Phaedrus* then portrays Socrates putting forward a view of his own that takes up what was appealing in Aristophanes' story and gives love's recuperative power a new and socialized meaning.

The pairing in these terms, with one dialogue after the other, appears to presume that Plato wrote his dialogues in a fixed order, that modern scholars can determine what that order was, and that the order reflects and reveals a development in his thought. All these claims are contestable and they have all been contested in recent decades, even though (I believe) there is some truth in each one.

Claims of Platonic chronology are not hopeless. The *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* both fall into the category that was known for a time as "middle dialogues," namely the ones neither short and inconclusive, as those dialogues are that are called "Socratic" and imagined to come early; nor the dialogues called later works, which stand apart from the rest in their language, in the topics they explore, and in almost always having a main speaker other than Socrates.[2] These are called late on surer grounds than we have for calling the short dialogues early. In any case the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* have rarely been put into either chronological extreme, so they are not likely to have been written far apart in time.

More precisely we can appeal to analyses of the dialogues' language. Stylometric data are never perfect, and different criteria for identifying the dialogues' chronology can issue in very different results. Exactly because the analyses differ, though, it feels meaningful that they agree in putting the *Symposium* before the *Phaedrus*. The dialogue in which Aristophanes' version of recuperative love created a problem about *erôs* came before the one in which Socratic recuperative love tries to solve that problem.[3]

2 The short and inconclusive dialogues include *Alcibiades I*, *Charmides*, *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Laches*, and *Lysis*. Those called later are *Critias*, *Laws*, *Parmenides*, *Philebus* [in which Socrates *is* the main speaker], *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Timaeus*.

3 Ledger (1989) and Thesleff (1982). Thesleff complicates his chronology by differentiating between first and second "editions" of some dialogues, but both put the final form of the *Phaedrus* at least a decade after the finished *Symposium*. For discussion, see Nails (1992).

Chronology is not essential though. As encouraging as the stylometric confirmation is, my pairing of the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* does not need it. The *Symposium* may illustrate the problem that the *Phaedrus* is solving even if Plato wrote it 20 years later. He spelled out a promising conception of *erôs*, then went back to create a context for that conception with a related conception that goes wrong. I am calling the *Phaedrus* an answer to a question in the *Symposium*; I do not require Plato to have asked the question and then cast about for an answer, any more than a modern author needs to write the preface before the rest of the book. Where the story of *erôs* is concerned, we can remain agnostic about Plato's development and chronology. The logic in these two chapters has to do with a vision of corrupted love and the vision that redeems it. If Plato wrote the syllogism's minor premise before its major premise, no one needs to know.

## Two speeches by Socrates

On any sequencing of the dialogues, Plato opens up a debate between distinctly different accounts of *erôs*. The speech Socrates makes in the *Symposium*, and the teaching he attributes to Diotima in that speech, is answered by the main speech (called the "great speech") that he makes in the *Phaedrus.* For example – a difference that has received much attention – the *Phaedrus* seems to picture love that attaches to one object at a time, whereas Diotima envisions lovers' learning to pursue a *pelagos … tou kalou* "sea of beauty."[4]

A separate difference is that Diotima makes *erôs* a matter of initiation and the subject of lessons. The lover reaches new experiences. But according to the great speech in the *Phaedrus* a good lover is *artitelês* "recently initiated," someone who prenatally took in what needed to be learned.[5] If love still requires knowledge, loving is not the occasion in the *Phaedrus* (as it is in Diotima's speech) for acquiring that knowledge.[6] Instead love reminds embodied lovers of the greater realities they had known when they lived as souls above heaven, and a disciplined pursuit of love speeds their return to that first condition.[7]

In general the *Phaedrus* portrays *erôs* of the right kind as retrospective and recuperative and Diotima treats *erôs* as a prospect. What looks like monogamous activity in the *Phaedrus* follows from lovers' memories of the divine

4 Plato: "great speech," *Phaedrus* 244a–257a; speech of Diotima, *Symposium* 202a–212a; *pelagos*, *Symposium* 210d. The *Phaedrus* does not propose lifelong monogamy, but erotic attachment is selective (252c–d), and the mutual attentions that lovers pay each other imply at least temporary confinement of love to one person (253c–256d). This debate is indebted to Vlastos (1981), and was much enriched by Nussbaum (1979).

5 Plato *Phaedrus* 251a1.

6 Plato *Symposium*: *hêgoumenos* "guide" leads lover to higher love, 210a; Diotima a teacher, 201d, 207a; explains to Socrates that the ignorant don't want to learn, 204a. On initiatory language see Konstan (1998), Farrell (1999), and Evans (2006). Regarding initiation and teaching, see Evans (2006, 18).

7 Plato *Phaedrus*: lover *artitelês*, 251a; return to heavenly existence, 248c–249b.

company they'd ridden in. You love one rather than another because you and your loved one kept company during your previous lives.[8] And because the great speech envisions birth as misfortune, occasioning embodied life for souls that had been made to live without bodies, the *erôs* it creates seeks not some new nature for itself but the prenatal nature it had already known. Love brings about movement toward an earlier and better condition. For this reason lovers need no instruction. Teachers become extraneous to learning when learning amounts to the return to what had been known.

Diotima herself identifies Aristophanes as the theorist she most opposes – even does so in a peculiar way, reaching out from the conversation that she purportedly had with Socrates years before to correct a thesis not yet enunciated until this evening's dinner. More strangely yet she contradicts Socrates on each of the points at which the *Phaedrus*'s Socrates contradicts *her*. (1) Aristophanes' crazy story about happy people bisected into desperate lovers makes restoration the purpose of *erôs*. All erotic energy is spent seeking to rebecome one of those first double humans. (2) If the *Phaedrus* finds value in one-to-one attachments in place of Diotima's oceanic love object, Aristophanes makes that exclusivity essential. Only one person can be your love object, as only one nose can be yours. (3) If teaching brings a person to new knowledge, it has no place in Aristophanes' story of love. The lover who moves toward something new is the failed, lonely, and unhappy lover.[9]

Childbirth figures in all these theories. But it figures so differently on different accounts, and so obscurely in the story of Aristophanes – positively cloaked or hidden – that the full reading of a crisis in existence and its philosophical amelioration needs to begin by bringing that dimension of the narrative to light. By the time this chapter ends it should be clearer that Socrates needs to say more; it might even be plausible that he promises to: that the last thing he tells a pair of drunken playwrights looks ahead to the *Phaedrus* and what more he will say there.

## The speech of Aristophanes

Spherical four-armed and four-legged creatures with a face on each side of their heads rose up against the gods long ago and were punished by being bisected. The trauma left them craving their lost other halves – left *us* with the craving, really, these split people being what are known as humans now. All *erôs* originates in this craving and pursues the half-body that will reconstitute the ruined first person.

8 Plato *Phaedrus* 252d.

9 Plato *Symposium*: story by Aristophanes and his response, 189c–193d; Diotima identifies him as opposition, 205e, 212c. My treatment might differ most from Nussbaum's on this point; she focuses on Alcibiades as emblem of love for a single other, while I take such *erôs* to be paradigmatically expressed by Aristophanes.

The story is supremely memorable as a stand-alone image, the way Plato's cave and Atlantis are; which may explain why it feels familiar (as Atlantis and the cave do) even to people who do not recognize the image as Plato's. The musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, later a film, includes a song about love based on Aristophanes' myth, and online discussions of *Hedwig* inform their readers of the song's source, assuming it not to be well known.[10]

On the other hand those who know the story to be Plato's sometimes mistakenly treat it as his own statement about love. Both Freud and Jung took the tale to assert the bisexuality of all humans, *and* treated that lesson as Plato's assertion.[11]

If anything the story's mixture of joyous invention and pessimistic significance makes it sound authentically Aristophanic, even imaginably something from a lost play restated in prose and purged of its ribaldry.[12] But readers seem to want to call the speech Plato's, possibly because it rings true and evokes romance. The right person for you is out there waiting! And when you do find the mate specially suited to you, you can't think of anything better to do than lie intertwined with that person, whom you would merge with if you could. At its best, love for another is like the feeling you have for your own body.

The merry romance in Aristophanes' tale dissolves after a little reflection. Many commentators have drawn out the story's depressing implications. We are injured beings even when we imagine ourselves to be whole. If only one person can remedy the injury we've suffered, how does anyone find that only one? Consider the world's population – and don't cut it in half by limiting partners to a single gender, because until you find the one for you there is no way to predict which gender you're looking for. Even in sparsely populated antiquity the world was crammed full of possible love objects, and there is no heuristic for discovering the right one. You may know the person just right for you when you see them, but you don't know what to look for when you're trying to find them.

Besides – and this reinforces the point about the absent heuristic – if caring for someone the way you care for your own hand or foot resonates emotionally

10 *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (John Cameron Mitchell 2001); the IMDB page on Hedwig lists the allusion to Plato among "trivia about the film: www.imdb.com/title/tt0248845/trivia?ref_=tt_trv_trv. Retrieved January 28, 2018.

11 Misattributions of the story: Allen (1984, 31–32). See Freud (1901–1905, 136); Jung (1969, 55).

12 Peter Simpson pressed this question in conversation. The origin of the story does not affect my reading, but I would expect the best evidence for the answer to lie in the extant comedies that Aristophanes produced by the time of the *Symposium*'s dramatic date. Those include two visions of audacious humans ascending into heaven. (1) Trygaeus, hero of *Peace*, rides a gigantic dung beetle into the sky, feeding it out of his own body as if the two formed one self-sufficient being. (2) Pisthetairos, hero of *Birds*, leads birds in an embargo that cuts the gods off from sacrifices, as the gods face being cut off in the *Symposium*-Aristophanes' story (190c). *Birds* also contains a relevantly similar tale of the earliest birds and their relationship to *erôs* (693–707).

as a description of being in love, it also suggests that the attachment is not based on any qualities the person has. You don't protect your hands because they are more attractive or sensitive or powerful than other hands but only because they have always been yours.

If it is not bad enough that love is based on nothing, suppose you find the right person only to learn that that special someone is married to someone else. Suppose *you* are already married. Now the only options you have are to destroy existing families or surrender your hope for happiness. The same holds if your other half belongs to a different community, maybe one that yours is at war with.

In fact renouncing the reunion is *worse* than surrendering your hope for happiness. Many people resign themselves to life without happiness; this possibility, finding the other half and not having them, means a life without being human, and right when the chance for humanity was in view. Once you understand yourself as half of a true human being, giving up the restitution of your original nature repeats the unbearable original trauma.

The depressing implications, that the loved one cannot be found yet must be found, lie at the heart of a widespread reading of the Aristophanes story. The reading is sound, especially by virtue of not being distracted either by the story's gaiety or by its romantic vision of *erôs*. It is sufficiently sound that any new approach ought to preserve this reading's attentiveness to the irrationality and danger in the story. One can't either make the story a joyous account of carefree love or omit the truths (about feeling completed by love) that give it its appeal.

What an interpretation *should* do is speak to the flavor of Aristophanes' story, and address peculiarities that the usual summary leaves out. This "flavor" means more than anything else the story's brushes with tragedy, or *paratragoedia* "paratragedy, parody of tragedy." The real Aristophanes wrote plays that quoted mockingly from tragic poets and often enough brought tragedies to the stage.[13] In the same spirit, the *Symposium*'s character Aristophanes cites epic actions and tragic proverbs in somber counterpoint to his narrative's frolics.

The story's initial uprising and punishment belong in that somber counterpoint. The *Symposium*'s Aristophanes points out the epic legacy of his tale when he compares the upstart first double humans to Ephialtes and Otus as they were told of in Homer.[14] And a near-parallel appears in Hesiod, according to whom Prometheus encouraged our ancestors to insult the gods, and Zeus punished them with the divinely fabricated Pandora, the first woman, thus punished them with sexual reproduction,[15] just as Plato's Aristophanes' Zeus punishes early humans by fabricating them into creatures who breed sexually.

13 Memorable examples occur in *Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazusae*, and *Frogs*, but *Wasps* and *Birds* (among others) nod toward the possibility of tragedy. See Nelson (2016).

14 Plato *Symposium* 190c. See the story in Homer *Odyssey* 11.305–308; also "Apollodorus" *Library* 1.7.4.

15 Hesiod *Theogony* 570–591, *Works and Days* 47–109.

The story also touches on tragedy with its aboriginal three genders of protohumans. In Aeschylus's *Seven against Thebes*, Eteocles delivers a speech addressed (as he says) to "man, woman, or what is in the borderline between [*metaichmion*]."[16] What Eteocles says in a hard moment, preparing for war, turns comical in a portrait of humanity's ancestors.

*Paratragoedia* appears again when Aristophanes approaches the end of his speech. Consider both the caution and the consolation that he offers: the caution to be orderly in our actions lest we be ripped in half again, in which case we'll go around on a single foot; the consolation that although reunion with the mythic other half is best, what's best under the circumstances is the lesser prize of finding someone naturally like-minded.[17] This caution depicts human locomotion as four legs, then two, then one, in a farcical echo of the Sphinx's riddle about an animal that walks on four, then two, then three.[18]

The consolation divides love's possibilities into the *ariston* "best" and *anagkaion kai tôn nun parontôn to toutou eggutatô ariston einai* "necessarily what is nearest to this is best as things are now." That is a comic mangling redoing, or undoing, a verse from Theognis that resurfaced in *Oedipus at Colonus* and elsewhere, calling never-being-born the *ariston* choice for humans and early death the second-best (i.e., best under the circumstances).[19]

The speech mixes its tragical seasonings into comical illogic. Richard Hunter identifies "faultlines" in the speech, like this one: "birth and childhood are not easily accommodated to the idea of our original doubleness (where is a baby's 'other half'?)."[20] To put Hunter's point another way, the myth is either about our ancestors or about us. If the gods split our ancestors in half, I am sorry for their sakes to hear the news, but it doesn't leave me with another half of me walking around somewhere, any more than the evolutionary account of my ancestors' tails implies that I'm now missing a tail. On the other hand, if the gods carried out this division in my own body, it is surprising that I don't remember the event. The first order of business might be to work out the causal sequence, and what present-day phenomena, otherwise unexplained, find their explanation in the mythical past.

16 Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 197; see Plato *Symposium* 190b.

17 Plato *Symposium*: avoid being redivided, 193a4–6; walk on one foot, 190d5–6; consolation, 193c5–8.

18 The riddle does not appear in extant tragedies. We find it in later sources: "Apollodorus" *Library* 3.5.8; Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 10.83. But there is reason to believe it was known at the time of Athenian tragedy, because of images of the Sphinx riddling Oedipus on Athenian pottery, and allusions to the riddle in tragedy – for example, Aeschylus *Agamemnon*: "extreme age walks its roads three-legged [*tripodas*]" (80–82); likewise Euripides *Trojan Women* 275–277. See West (1978, 293) and Catenaccio (2012, 102–107).

19 Plato *Symposium* 193c. The sentiment appears in Theognis 425–428; Bacchylides 5.159–161; and Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 1225–1230. Epicurus is said to have weighed and rejected this advice, Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 10.1.126–127. This suggests that the statement had become proverbial.

20 Hunter (2004, 67).

Two more perplexities need addressing. First, the two-in-ones who preceded existing humans each had two faces that looked *homoia pantê* "entirely alike, alike in all ways."[21] Is this feature supposed to explain something? Lovers don't look alike. This myth is sometimes said to have been inspired by Empedocles, because he speaks of a time when two faces came together in a single person.[22] But if we give Empedocles the credit for that idea, the similarity of the faces becomes all the more incongruous, given that the fragment of Empedocles does not mention the faces' looking alike.[23]

Second, why did the gods cut humans up in two stages? Zeus and Apollo worked together to bisect the two-in-ones and rotate their heads so they could see the scars from their surgery; then later, as an afterthought, Zeus brought the creatures' private parts around to their wounded front sides, in order to let them engage in sexual relations and so temporarily ease their yearnings for each other. Why drag the process out? What is the story explaining with the two distinct surgeries that it could not take care of just as well by having a single divine act create the people we know and love today?[24]

## The story of Aristophanes as etiological myth

One approach to the story focuses on the causal explanation it provides. Zeus punishes the original humans by cutting them into the mutilated creatures who walk the earth today on two legs, their faces rotated to the side on which they were bisected. Here we have an etiological myth, suited to the story's tragic touches, that accounts for what we know as our own kind.

Gábor Betegh has identified etiological myth as a genre of Platonic myth in which divine action within the story explains something observed in reality.[25] Thus first of all we differentiate such stories from the dialogues' myths of judgment, whose effect (divine justice) is precisely what does *not* get observed in life. Plato's etiological tales resemble some traditional myths. A girl who wove tapestries dared to rival Athena and was turned into a spider; hence cobwebs. When Tithonus loved the goddess of dawn she arranged for him to be made immortal but forgot to have him kept forever young, and he aged into a cricket who greets his love every morning. Hence morning chirping.

Betegh takes the story of Aristophanes to fit into the same genre; Hunter too identifies the narrative logic in the myth as "that of the etiological 'just-so'

21 Plato *Symposium* 190a1.

22 O'Brien (1969, 227–230). The source for this passage would be fragment 61.

23 Empedoclean ideas would have been available equally to Plato and Aristophanes, so attributing this detail to Empedocles does not settle whether the story might have come from an actual comedy. Even as Empedoclean cosmology, this could come either directly from Plato or via Aristophanes.

24 Plato *Symposium*: Zeus and Apollo split humans, 190d6–191a5; Zeus moves private parts, 191b5–c8.

25 Betegh (2009).

story."[26] We embrace our loved ones in an effort to return to our previous doubled condition. Then we have sexual relations because the frottage in this embrace stimulates the organs that a not-pitiless god moved around to our front sides.

But at a crucial turn the story conjures up the spirit of mythic etiology only to send it unwelcome back to the underworld, when it defeats expectations about mythical explanations. The dynamic point comes at a probative moment. An etiological myth will tell you "Go and see the monster's bones" or the equivalent. Spanning the distance between present and mythic past, such proof-gestures identify a perceived event or object as the consequence of what happened long ago. Presumably that perceived event has something about it that requires divine action. Winter signifies Persephone's annual stay in Hades. The spider's web today recalls a goddess's ancient fury. Such moments of proof connect experience to something momentous that happened in a barely imaginable past.

Looking for an analogous proof in Aristophanes' story shows where the etiological myth-pattern fits but also where it collapses. Aristophanes says that Apollo tied off the loose skin that Zeus had cut through, producing what people now call an *omphalos* "navel." Then Apollo smoothed out most of the wrinkles he had made "but left a few, those around the belly [*gastera*] itself and the navel [*omphalon*], to be a memorial of the old suffering [*mnêmeion … tou palaiou pathous*]."[27]

Aristophanes will soon be telling the other symposiasts that lovers riddle and prophesy as oracles do. What does the soul of a lover want (he asks rhetorically) when the other half has been discovered and the two are lying together? He answers his own question *ou dunatai epein, alla manteuetai ho bouletai, kai ainittetai* "it isn't able to say, but divines or prophesies what it desires, and riddles."[28] When Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff translate this sentence they supply additional words that capture the sentence's exact significance. The soul "cannot say what it is, but like an oracle it has a sense of what it wants, and like an oracle it hides behind a riddle."[29]

Oracular talent in a person; participation in this myth by Apollo the god of divination; the first stage's ending with the severed creature's attention fixed on *omphalos* and *gastêr*: All promise entry into a prophetic realm. The Greeks located Delphi at the center of the earth's surface or navel, sometimes identifying one engraved stone there as the *omphalos*.[30] As at Delphi,

26 Hunter (2004, 65). David Halperin too calls the story "aetiological" (Halperin 1990a, 21). I am indebted more than my references indicate to Halperin's reading of the Aristophanes story in this piece and in 1990b (126–127).

27 Plato *Symposium*: *omphalos*, 190e9; *oligas de* etc., 191a3–5.

28 Plato *Symposium* 192d1–2.

29 Cooper (1997, 475).

30 Delphi called *omphalos*, for example, Plato *Republic* 4.427c. The stone identified as swaddled rock presented to Cronus as Zeus, Hesiod *Theogony* 498–500; Pausanias *Description of Greece* 10.24.6; as tomb of Pytho, Varro *Lingua Latina* 7.17; as tomb of Dionysus, Tatian *Oration*

so on your body, the acts of Apollo in connection with a navel bring about oracular mutterings.[31] The word *gastêr* "belly" reinforces the oracular reading, thanks to its association with the inspired utterances translated misleadingly as "ventriloquism," which came from the soothsayers called *eggastrimuthoi* "belly-talkers."[32]

Again the lovers' inarticulate pronouncements originate in Apollo's redesign of their bodies. If there were an etiology, this moment would provide it. Human prophetic powers today would call for the gods' extensive engagement in human bodies.

Instead of *mythos* Aristophanes offers comic bathos. All that action by mighty gods produces the ordinariest sights on earth: human beings contemplating the scars and the folds around their bellies and navels to remember the time "long ago" when they used to be attached to someone else. There is no mythologizing involved in calling the *omphalos* and *gastêr* points at which one person separated from another. That is what those body parts always were and have been known to be. From the born human's point of view, the *omphalos* literally memorializes suffering long ago, or as far back as a born human can recall, when the person emerged in childbirth and had the umbilical cord severed. From the point of view of the one who gave birth, before that moment carrying the baby in the *gastêr* – "belly" but also "womb" – again what you look down at is where you used to be joined to someone else.[33]

The story is not behaving as etiological myths do. You really did use to be connected to someone else. Your abdomen really does show the scar of the separation. Moreover the old combined being (pregnant mother) was round. If you count the limbs of the child being carried, there were four arms and four legs to that being. Ancient mothers must have known that prenatal babies inside them turned somersaults, as Aristophanes says the two-in-one people did.[34]

*against the Greeks* 8.4. A tombstone can be a memorial, so on these accounts the Delphic navel is a *mnêmeion tou palaiou pathous*. For theories of the *omphalos*, see Scott (2014, 36n19).

31 Also see "Apollodorus" calling the *omphalos* the voice of the gods, *FGrHist* 244f94–99. In yet another variant that could apply to this story, the Delphic *omphalos* has legal significance as the seat of a justice even older than Apollo's (Gernet 1981, 323).

32 Belly-talking prophecy: Plato *Sophist* 252c; Aristophanes *Wasps* 1016–1020. Also see Plutarch *De defectu oraculorum* [*The Obsolescence of Oracles*] 9 (*Moralia* 2.414e). Hippocrates *On Epidemics* 5.63 compares the symptoms of a woman with *kunagchê* (peritonsillar abscess?) – clenched jaw, muffled voice, distorted vowels – to sounds made by *eggastrimuthoi.* On practical realities of ancient ventriloquism see Davis (2003); on oracular role, Tovar and Maravela-Solbakk (2001).

33 From Homer till after Plato the *gastêr* could refer not only to "belly" but also narrowly to uterus, belly as holder of child. See LSJ on *gastêr*; also Homer *Iliad* 6.58; Herodotus *Histories* 3.32; Plato *Laws* 7.792e. Jacques Jouanna makes the point about Hippocratic writings (e.g., *Ancient Medicine* chapter 11): The word *gastêr* "could be used to indicate where a pregnant woman carried her child" (Jouanna 1999, 314).

34 Plato *Symposium* 190a5–8. For Biblical vigorous activity in the uterus, see Jacob and Esau wrestling, Genesis 25.22; John the Forerunner hearing Mary's voice, Luke 1.41–44.

Aristophanes has tried to tell a story of human beings' incompleteness. If you depict incompleteness mythically, you are obliged to imagine a time when people possessed what they would come to lose; and by this narrative logic, *erôs* as lack turns into *erôs* as loss. The myth locates the loss in an ancient time. But suppose Aristophanes has identified the true mechanism by which love is created, through loss of a companionship you once had. Outside of myth the clearest example of such a loss in a life occurs at the beginning.[35]

It is worth adding that mother and child look alike. Unusual between lovers, likeness between parent and child is the norm. All in all Aristophanes has told a myth that recapitulates the narrative of birth, yielding the result that *erôs* in human beings is the love that begins between children and their parents. This must also be the reason for mentioning oracles and riddles, because the most famous legendary figure whose story involves oracular warnings and riddles is the one who married his mother.

## Support for this reading

Several details in the story come into focus on a reading of bisection as birth. I already called the progression from four legs to two and then one a comical variation on the Sphinx's riddle; and now Aristophanes has a special reason for alluding to the Sphinx, beyond tragic parody, when everyone risks becoming an Oedipus.

Another reference to tragedy already cited also harks back to Oedipus, and has a new point to it. I observed that Aristophanes concludes with a consolatory return to reality. Ostensibly recognizing the example of Pausanias and Agathon, he seems to be saying – in a way that his story did not prepare for – that you never do get the boy or girl. It is as if Aristophanes realizes at the end of his story how unusual it would be to find the lone individual just right for you, so he offers the compromise that you might run into someone likeminded – or, as one translation phrases it, "young men who are naturally sympathetic to us."[36]

Discovering a sympathetic mate is "best as things are now [*tôn nun parontôn … ariston*]." On the manifest reading of the story, that existing best person makes up for the implausibility of finding the one you were made to love. But when *erôs* begins at birth, the compensatory offer responds to the *unacceptability* of loving that one. You would expect a consolatory conclusion

35 When putting this book into final form for publication I came across anticipations of two of this chapter's claims in Slater (1968): "androgyne" representing mother and child, 112; the half-humans' yearning "pregenital" before their follow-up surgery, 113.

36 Plato *Symposium* 193c5–8: *kata noun autôi* "compatibly with one's own mind." Thus Nehamas and Woodruff: "If that is the ideal, then, the nearest approach to it is best in present circumstances, and that is to win the favor of young men who are naturally sympathetic to us" (Cooper 1997, 476).

if the reachievement of doubled life were incestuous reunion with a parent. It bespeaks the acknowledgment of the taboos that civilization depends on.

I remarked on the parodic echo of tragic defeatism in the linguistic structure of Aristophanes' concession or consolation. That structure must have been instantly recognizable when Plato was writing, for the sad sentiment not only appeared in poets before him but was attributed to Silenus the satyr, as if it were ancient wisdom.[37] Aristophanes describes what is *ariston* "best" but impossible, and then the lesser outcome that is best under the circumstances. Where tragedy and the old satyr called the *ariston* option *mê phunai* or *mê genesthai* "not to have been born,"[38] Plato's Aristophanes calls it "returning to one's ancient nature." Where dying soon was second-best for them, his second-best is finding a soul mate.[39]

For Aristophanes as for those not joking, the second-best mimics the best. As dying soon emulates the state of never existing, affection for someone with a mind like your own simulates the return to primal union. To be sure comedy's realistic alternative is merciful, replacing immediate death with available sexual relations. But read as an allegory of birth and mother-love, the speech of Aristophanes does not even parody, it restates, the wisdom of Silenus. The best fate, understood as union with the parent you were born from, takes you to the state you had been in before you were born. In other words it keeps you unborn. Union with one's mother-half, the best thing for mortals, means evading the regrettable first exit into sunlight, not having been born.

I mentioned another puzzling feature of the story. Why should omniscient gods have separated our ancestors in two steps rather than just one?

Here I do not claim that only my reading makes sense of the story.[40] Creating the occasion for longing apart from sex also lets the Platonic Aristophanes illuminate something that is inherently mysterious about human desire. Being in love goes with sex as a matter of course, and yet lovers often say that the sex falls short of accounting for the love. The myth expresses the contingency in the connection between *erôs* and sex by imagining love as it had been before sex. At best sex is so fatiguing that lovers briefly lose the energy it takes to pine for reunion with their other halves. So sexual intercourse does not relieve the yearning, only weakens the available force one has to yearn with.

37 Aristotle attributes the saying to Silenus, and claims it to have been old and long-repeated, in his lost dialogue *Eudemus*, as quoted in Plutarch *Consolation to Apollonus* 27 (115b–d). For text and commentary see Hani (1972).

38 The best option is called *ariston* in Theognis and Aristotle as in the story of Aristophanes; Theognis, Bacchylides, and Sophocles identify that never-being as *mê phunai* "not to have been born," Aristotle as *mê genesthai* "not to have come to be."

39 Plato *Symposium*: return to ancient nature, 193c4–5; best possible, 193c8–9. Sophocles and Aristotle both speak of what is *deuteron* "second-best," identifying it with dying *hôs tachista* "as quickly as possible"; Theognis says *ôkista* "swiftly."

40 On the mysterious place of sex relative to love in this passage, see Halperin (1990b, 126–127) and Hunter (2004, 68).

Reading the myth that way rings true, as far as it goes, although – strictly speaking – it assumes the myth to have sexualized the bipeds in the second stage, prior to which they had been nonsexual. The myth does not say that. The original two-in-one humans had sexual organs but used them for reproducing autochthonously, as the Greeks believed that cicadas did.[41] Aristophanes could have said at this point that Zeus created genitals where humans hadn't had any. Instead he says the genitals had been on human bodies all along, but on the side that became a biped's backside. In the second stage of creation the genitals came to the side that people's faces were on. In other words, what happened in this stage is that previously unnoticed genitals came into view. The halved humans first saw their sexuality.

If the myth is narrating a version of personal history, this second event in human life reads as puberty. The creatures had been sexed but failed to see that they were. What we now call latency is the state in which human beings can desire and long but do not perceive their desire as related to their sexual organs, which might as well be tucked away behind them. Accordingly those languishing first embraces told of in the myth are the child's embraces before discovering sexuality.

## Objection to the childbirth reading and supporting considerations

One counterexample to this reading might seem to come from the apparent theory of sexual orientation in the speech, which makes yesterday's "androgyns" or intersex double creatures yield today's heterosexuals, while those who had been all-female protohumans are lesbians, and the present halves of all-male ancestors are homosexual men.[42] Reading the myth as an allegory of birth makes the third category impossible, for it would imply (translating the allegory) that homosexual men were born from other men.

On the other hand, one can imagine a man's birth from another man. It is a fantasy of early childhood. Freud's essay "On the Sexual Theories of Children" already observed the idea that fathers carry babies.[43] This is one of many cases in which psychoanalysis recapitulates Greek mythology and its stories of paternal pregnancy. Aphrodite was born without a mother when Uranus's severed genitals splashed into the sea, and Dionysus came out of his father Zeus's thigh; and here in the *Symposium* Socrates calls Aristophanes a follower of both Dionysus and Aphrodite,[44] thus of two gods born of fathers. David Sider reads the *Symposium* at large as Dionysian festival, which reinforces the point.[45] At a night devoted to honoring Dionysus and male *erôs* toward other men, Aristophanes' mythic account of love is not incomplete

41 Plato *Symposium* 191b–c.
42 Plato *Symposium* 191d–e.
43 Freud (1975 [1908]).
44 Plato *Symposium* 177e1–2.
45 Sider (1980).

but on point. Love can happen man-to-man because, as this night's rites remind us, birth can bring male from male.

The children of Cronus were father-born, in a sense, when he vomited up the babies he had swallowed. Zeus was symbolically one of them, in the form of a swaddled rock that Cronus consumed believing it to be his son. So Zeus too is male born from male, according to one of those alimentary substitutions that children use in understanding reproduction. And he fits Aristophanes' description of the halves of former all-male beings, namely that they hold public office. Not only is Zeus the supreme holder of an office, but the *Symposium* reminds us (in Agathon's speech) that he created the *technê* of governance.[46]

In terms of what could have been thought and was said in the fifth century, it is worth adding that characters in tragedy voice the wish to return to an ancient condition of all-male reproduction. Hippolytus, in the play named after him, complains to Zeus that Zeus could have grown the human population without using women. In the *Medea* Jason says, "There should be some other way for mortals to make children [*paidas teknousthai*]," not through women.[47] The cultural resources exist to hypothesize birth from a father. Same-sex love between men turns out to be no rarer than the memory or hope concerning an all-male humanity that Plato's contemporaries had already heard about many times.

Outside of Greek antiquity a comparable belief has been observed among Senegal's Kujamaat Joola, who speak of the "fecal double" that a person can produce, the fecal double being a kind of totem animal. Both men and women have this power, and the animal they excrete has the same gender as their own.[48]

This is all to say that despite being biologically impossible, paternal pregnancy is imaginable, or imaginable enough not to refute the allegory of childbirth in Aristophanes. He even staged a symbolic birth comparable to that of a fecal double in his play *Ecclesiazusae* (*Assemblywomen*), whose male character Blepyrus labors to "deliver" his bowel movement (calling on the goddess of childbirth Ilithuia) just as Athenian women are symbolically abandoning their childbearing by taking over the assembly.[49]

46 Plato *Symposium*: halves of former double males in public office, 192a–b; Zeus and governance, 197b2–4. Cronus vomiting up Zeus, Hesiod *Theogony* 495–500. Leitao (2012) offers a different reading of the Aristophanes story, in although his concerns and mine, and his survey of Greek ideas of birth, overlap in places. Certainly, he gives a definitive answer to the objection that Aristophanes' story would rule out male pregnancy, for in his discussion of the *Symposium* and its forebears Leitao shows how extensive that fantasy is in Greek thought.

47 Euripides *Hippolytus* 616–619, *Medea* 573–575. See Loraux (1993, 72–73).

48 Sapir (1977). I am grateful to Marie Nazon for discussing the context of this belief with me.

49 Aristophanes *Ecclesiazusae* 369. See Leitao (2012, 146–181). This chapter, "Blepyrus's Turd-Child and the Birth of Athena," shows how elaborately Aristophanes casts the man's anal "birthing" as a source of masculine power.

Within the *Symposium*, two things that Socrates says indicate the dialogue's consciousness of the significance I have given to Aristophanes' myth. The first appears when Socrates is cross-examining Agathon. He wants to demonstrate the incompleteness or absence in all love. "Tell me this, whether *erôs* is the kind of being who is *erôs* of someone or not?"

It is a fair question until Socrates explains himself. "I am not asking," he says, "whether he is a mother's or father's – for it would be a ridiculous [*geloion*] question if *erôs* were *erôs* toward a mother or father – but as if I were to ask regarding a father, is a father someone's father or not?" As anyone called a father must be father *to* someone else, so too love must be the love *of* some object.[50] The peculiar thing here is not the logical analysis of love's relational quality, but the trouble Socrates goes to to rule out a misinterpretation that no one would have thought of: Is love an erotic desire for mother or father? Then Socrates adds that the question would be *geloion* "ridiculous, laughable," which is to say a question fit for comedy or for the comic playwright who just spoke, and who said when beginning that what is *geloion* is proper to his muse.[51]

The other remark from Socrates reinforces my reading obliquely. It comes during the speech that he attributes to Diotima, and her anachronistic digression within that speech to rebut Aristophanes.[52] We don't love what used to be part of our own bodies, Diotima says, unless we also consider that body part a good one. She introduces and distances herself from the explanatory principle that we love what belongs to us.

Diotima's aside becomes relevant to my reading a little later, when she apparently falls into the same habit of thinking she rebuked Aristophanes for. Suzanne Obdrzalek has pointed out Diotima's recapitulation of what she identifies as wrong thinking.[53] Why do people have babies? Diotima says it is because they want something of themselves to carry on after they die. People love an offshoot of themselves, an *apoblastêma*.[54] A *blastê* is a growth or outcropping; and the essential point is that Diotima uses that word as a metaphor for one's child, thereby pointing to the subject of childbirth latent in Aristophanes' story. For if a single explanatory principle "love for what is one's own" covers both childbirth and the gigantic mitosis that Aristophanes told of, then those two processes look alike. Mythical splitting resembles birth, as I am saying it does in Aristophanes' story. In other words, when Diotima

50 Plato *Symposium* 199d2–5. For discussion see Schindler (2007), who points out the strange digression, 205; but he takes it to be a response to Agathon, who had made love into attraction of like for like without imagining the incestuous implications of that view.

51 Plato *Symposium* 189b.

52 Plato *Symposium* 205d10–e3.

53 Obdrzalek (2010, 427) calls Diotima's claims here "an intriguing parallel to the Aristophanic account."

54 Plato *Symposium* 208b5.

uses the word for off-*shoot* as a metaphor for off-*spring*, she retrospectively makes Aristophanes' story resemble a story of birth.

That a Greek myth should tell of parental incest is supremely believable. Orphic cosmogony alone seems bent on incorporating such relations into its story of the world, as when Zeus rapes his mother, then the sister-and-daughter born of that union.[55] But the germane question might be whether Aristophanes could have told a mythic story to this allegorical effect, and indeed whether Plato would have considered him capable of such effects. To me this is not a hard question; I find Aristophanes remarkable in his capacity to introduce forbidden thoughts by indirect means.

The prefatory scene in Aristophanes' *Wasps*, in which two slaves tell their dreams, lets a particular forbidden thought escape through a mechanism that Freud would have been proud to puzzle out. The Athenians appear in one dream as sheep, and a political insider named Theorus has the head of a *korax* "crow." Alcibiades is in the dream too, talking with his well-known lambdacism, substituting "l" for "r." So he says Theorus has the head of a *kolax*, a lickspittle or toady.[56]

What makes the word forbidden is that Theorus was an ally of Cleon, who had already prosecuted Aristophanes over Aristophanes' depictions of him.[57] Given the allegory of citizen-sheep's being fleeced and slaughtered by democratic leaders, the verbal closeness between one more animal and a leader's toady finds its release through another politician's mispronunciation. The dream plucks meaning out of terms that appear randomly concatenated, as Freud's examples of dreams do.[58]

Plato must have recognized the acuity of the play's joke–dream; and from *Ecclesiazusae* he knew what psycho-politics Aristophanes was capable of.[59] In an Athens taken over by women, a young man must defer sexual relations with his peer until he has completed sexual relations with an old woman.

55 Evidence for Orphic theogony is difficult to find; the Derveni Papyrus, written before Plato's dialogues, breaks off just as we hear of Zeus's desire for his mother (Rhea/Demeter). Later, sources attest to Zeus's raping Persephone, his daughter by Demeter: Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 4.4.1, Nonnus *Dionysiaca* 6.155. Bremmer (2014, 61–63) argues that the incestuous unions finally producing Zagreus belong to an early part of the story.

56 Aristophanes *Wasps*: Athenians as sheep, 32; Theorus *korax*, 43; Alcibiades says *kolax*, 45. On his lambdacism (called "traulism" by Greeks), Plutarch *Life of Alcibiades* 1.4.

57 Aristophanes *Acharnians*: Theorus as Cleon's ally, 153–156; Cleon's prosecutions, 377–382, 502–503. Possible reference to a second prosecution, *Wasps* 1284–1291. On the claim of prosecution and basis in fact, see Carey (1994).

58 Reckford (1987, 219–233) comments in general terms about these opening dream-anecdotes.

59 It is relevant to a mention of political thought in *Ecclesiazusae* that it shares elements of utopia, including the participating of women in governance, with Plato's *Republic*. Chapter 3 will comment on what we can infer about the relationship between the two works. Here I am only assuming that when Plato wrote the *Symposium* he knew *Ecclesiazusae*.

Some old women come upon an amorous couple and fight over the man. The young woman aghast says: "The earth will fill with Oedipuses!"[60]

Once women enter the assembly and legislate the fulfillment of popular desires, this kind of thing is bound to follow. The Oedipal scene has presumably been kept from appearing by masculine laws that quashed the most antisocial desires. The play represents *erôs* between mother and son as (speaking from the point of view of nature) a standing possibility.

## The threat of incest

If *Ecclesiazusae* implies that releasing female desires will license mother/son love (as if because that love is always awaiting release), the *Republic* answers with a law to prevent such a consequence in its own city partly ruled by women. Socrates interrupts his proposal for open breeding within the ruling classes to answer the objection that open breeding permits incest. Prohibiting sexual relations on the basis of when one person was born and the other gave birth would rule out unions between parent and child. Socrates touches on the possibility of unions between siblings, but with less concern. The new rules will prevent all incestuous relations between generations and none that might arise within a generation. If it happens that a brother and sister are selected to breed together, the city's rulers will allow it to happen as long as the oracle permits sibling-pairings.[61]

Either incest would occur only accidentally in the new city, where the guardians reproduce on assignment and turn their children over to nurseries, so that members of the guardian classes grow up ignorant of parents and siblings. Book 5 of the *Republic* imagines one of the two kinds of incest as a horrifying accident, as Sophocles also imagines it in his tale of Oedipus. That it might be worse than accident emerges in Book 9, when the *Republic* examines the tyrannical personality. This most degraded of all souls, being as it is the soul with the most enlarged sexual desires, is the one most apt to indulge forbidden desires for an animal or for a parent.[62]

The *Republic*'s asymmetrical response to the two species of incest first of all fills in the significance of the *erôs* we glimpse behind Aristophanes' merry romance. In the *Republic* as in *Ecclesiazusae*, union between parent and child

60 Aristophanes *Ecclesiazusae* 1041. Vidović (2017) argues that this reference involves *Oedipus at Colonus*, permitting Aristophanes to allude to the attempted abductions of Antigone and Oedipus in that tragedy. Despite the different purposes behind our two readings, Vidović's reinforces my point that this is not a throwaway line but moves the Oedipal crisis into focus.

61 Plato *Republic*: breeding and incest, 5.461c–d; unions between siblings, 5.461e1–3. Socrates' remark can be taken to refer to permission for an individual pairing, or for the general policy. To consult the oracle every time brother and sister were about to breed, the rulers would need an archive about guardians' ancestry so complete that the city wouldn't need its cumbersome policies for preventing cross-generational incest. So apparently a nod from the oracle licenses all sibling marriages.

62 Plato *Republic* 9.571c9–d2.

is treated as both the collapse of order and a natural potentiality lying in wait for law to loose its grip on people. But I am also pointing out the difference between the two kinds of incest because it marks the distance between two ways of taking Aristophanes' story. Emmanuel Levinas for one invokes incest when elucidating the *erôs* of the Aristophanic story, but does so to emphasize the unproductive conservatism in half-humans of the present who seek to become again no more than what they had once been. These humans don't grow and learn. You might call what they feel *erôs* but it is a desire for the most familiar of experiences: childhood: the family. The love that fails to relate to an Other will "be divested of all transcendence, seek but a connatural being, a sister soul, present itself as incest"; and Levinas associates such love with the story Aristophanes tells in the *Symposium*.[63]

This is an incest not preceded by birth. In Freudian language one could say it portrays Aristophanic *erôs* as the compulsion to repeat. Relations in adulthood are forced to replay relationships, crises, and unsettled business carried over from childhood.

Levinas's reading ascribes a significant account of love to the *Symposium*'s Aristophanes, and I do not dismiss it. I only find that his interpretation looks past the threat in Aristophanes' story. Harking back to childhood is the sign of a *stuck* person incapable of learning, but it is not the sign of a threat to human society. The incest involved, if you want to call it that, is metaphorical. In any case it is the sibling connection that the *Republic* treats as distinctly less to be feared than the parental connection is.

Love directed at yourself, the love of who you are now, is indeed immature and does resist development. It has no future – which is a figurative way of saying that someone who loves in that fashion has no future in loving. But although the future also suffers in parental incest, the vision of that incest that attracts the most horrified attention is spoken of as an attack on the past as well. When Sophocles' chorus pictures Oedipus having returned to plow in "his father's furrows" it is describing an aggressive movement into the past. By replacing his father behind the plow Oedipus has ventured to give birth to himself, retroactively creating a new beginning to the world.[64]

Remember that Sophocles' play had the title *Oedipus the Tyrant* not (as in its standard Latinized title) *Oedipus the King*. The connection between tyrants and Oedipal incest, noted in Book 9 of the *Republic*, found expression elsewhere in Greek culture too, with rumors of impermissible relations between tyrants and their mothers that allegorized the threat posed to civilization by tyranny. Stories circulated about Periander of Corinth and his mother. The physician Hippocrates went to Macedonia to treat Perdiccas II when Perdiccas was heartsick over his father's courtesan – a story we hear

63 Levinas (1969, 254). See discussion by Achtenberg (2008). In conversation, David Mikics helpfully amplified the difference between prospective and conservationist versions of love at stake.

64 Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1210.

again later about the physician Erasistratus (Aristotle's grandson) and King Antiochus. Symbolically, the Athenian tyrant Hippias consulted a soothsayer when he dreamt about incestuous relations with his mother. The soothsayer interpreted it to mean that Hippias would return to Athens and govern. (Centuries later a dream interpreter would speak in similar terms to Julius Caesar when he had a dream about sex with *his* mother.[65])

One way or other the tyrant makes the calendar begin with him, as if only he could function as sufficient cause for his own existence. Thus if we say that Diotima's love extends the aims of civilization, the Greeks might have said that it warded off tyranny.

In this connection it is essential that these fubsy first people in the myth of Aristophanes have the hubris of tyrants.[66] They assault Olympus. They would replace the gods if they could. This is the mode of being that lovers want to return to, not the stultified overdomestication of permanent company with siblings that is the stuff of stereotypes about aging bachelor brothers or spinster sisters. The *erôs* that Aristophanes describes seeks not to flee human society but to finish it. The original people climb mountains, they don't hide away on islands. These lovers, if there should ever be enough bad luck in the world to bring about their satisfaction, revert to the proud and greedy atavisms that gods find repellent.

## Diotima's reply

Translating the mythical bisection of primeval humans into the literal birth of today's people does not subvert the pathos and menace in the story, but repeats its moral as an alarm. Aristophanic *erôs* continues to be particularized and irrational, as Plato's readers already recognize it to be. The myth says explicitly that *erôs* began with a trauma; that the trauma left human beings incomplete; that they have no guide or method for overcoming their incompleteness, given that the only sign of having found the other half is the experience "This is the one for me." Aristophanes proceeds from depressing beginning to depressing outcome. He depicts love unmoored from reason, inasmuch as you have no reason to prefer this person over that one.

As far as the *sadness* of loss is concerned, reading the story as a story about birth carries the same resonance. Insofar as we are the ones born and ripped apart at the *omphalos*, all of us are foundlings exposed on hillsides as unwanted children (Oedipus included) had been exposed in myths and in real life. Insofar as we are the ones giving birth and ripped at the *gastêr*, we are mourning mothers (or fathers) robbed of beloved infants.

65 Incest and tyranny: Periander, Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 1.96; doctors and Oedipal desires, Jouanna (1999, 31); Suda s.v. "Hippocrates"; Antiochus, Plutarch *Life of Demetrius* 38.2–4; dream by Hippias, Herodotus *Histories* 6.107.1–2; by Caesar, Plutarch *Life of Caesar* 32.6; Suetonius– *Divus Julius* 7.

66 This comment comes out of conversation with Sabina Friedman-Seitz.

The *erôs* of Aristophanes does not only begin in pitiable loss but also ends up antisocial. This too emerges independent of reading the partitioning as parturition. First, in the analysis of sexual orientation, we find Aristophanes identifying heterosexuals as adulterers of both genders, the *moichos* and the *moicheutria*.[67] Considering how marriages come into existence, with arrangements among parents, there is no reason to expect that you will marry the one right person you love. So desiring the opposite sex disposes you to cheat on your spouse with someone else's. (It is hard to tell whether *androgunoi* "androgyns" is referring intentionally to folklore about double-sexed creatures, but the allusion is relevant. Weasels and rabbits were thought to exhibit both genders' characteristics, in the imaginative zoology of antiquity, and also regarded as lascivious.[68] If Aristophanes is trading on that belief, he is problematizing marriage, legitimacy, and inheritance even more than he seemed to.)

The speech shows decisively what is to be prohibited in *erôs* when Aristophanes pictures the sated happy couple, possessed of true love at last. They can't articulate what they want, he says.[69] It is another sign of the limits in their ability to reason. But if Hephaestus were to come and address the lovers, they would welcome his intervention. What if he offered to fasten them together again? All lovers would desire that, Aristophanes says, and it's a pretty image: Hephaestus performs a new operation to reverse Apollo's anthropectomy.

In Plato's time that image would have sounded ugly. *His* readers would think of the story told in the *Odyssey*, in which Hephaestus used his savvy to exactly this effect, binding Ares and Aphrodite together when they joined to cuckold him. The bonds of Hephaestus unite not happy and compatible couples but adulterous lovers.[70]

Love is antisocial, especially for classical-period Athenian anxieties, when it issues in adultery. It is antisocial in the extreme, for the anxieties of civilized people everywhere, when it leads to incest. The customary reading of the myth made the point. The childbirth reading only insists upon it.

The new reading might seem to lose one implication of Aristophanes' story, that your other half can't be found. Millions of people roam the earth and you must guess which one is yours. But if the mythic division of humans is interpreted as birth, you can usually find the one you love.

67 Plato *Symposium* 191d–e.

68 On the hermaphroditism of the weasel, which represents "woman doing the acts of a man," see Horapollo *The Hieroglyphics* 2.36 (Bettini 2013, 166–168). Also see Laqueur (1990, 19). When understood as woman the weasel is already hypersexed in Semonides 7 (*Women*), 50–54. Love with the weasel-lady makes a man seasick, whether because of her sexual motions or her odor.

69 Plato *Symposium* 192c–d.

70 Homer *Odyssey* 8.266–366. I am grateful to Timothy Gould for pointing the allusion out to me.

If that is the good news, though, it's the only good news. The gloomy conclusion that the other half can't be found is more than adequately replaced by the terrifying thought that they will. You might even read the material impossibility of reunion with the right person as a symbol of its moral impermissibility. Your one true love is *the one love you may not have*, as in the story, but in a sense of *may not* that the story does not broach, where it means not "might not" but "must not."

Reading the myth as an allegory of childbirth also intensifies the polarization between Aristophanes and Socrates. Following Aristophanes, Diotima (according to Socrates) finds the source of desire in what one lacks. *Refusing* to follow Aristophanes, she expects *erôs* to attach itself to something good.[71] In search of objects for its desire, the soul advances toward what is ever more beautiful: from bodies to souls, from laws and customs to the beauty in all knowledge, finally to the Form of beauty.

Diotima's *erôs* moves toward increasingly general objects. The first moment of progress takes you from a single beautiful body you love to the beauty in all fine bodies.[72] It is a sign of philosophy's transformation of ordinary sentiment that this first step might look like promiscuity. Moreover some feature of the beloved object justifies the *erôs*. Thus Diotima's amendment to what Aristophanes proposed yields a theory that opposes his, first by enlarging the scope of erotic objects where he confined those to a single object, second by postulating a reason for *erôs* where he imagined attraction occurring for no reason at all, in all simplicity because *this is the one for me.*

Reading the Aristophanes story as childbirth strengthens Diotima's hand. It is one thing to say that the love she offers feels denatured and intellectualist when set against a life's passion for one true love. The romantic fantasy may leave you adrift in the world – you could end up alone if you don't happen to find your other half – but then we expect risks from love. Better the quest for a love worth feeling (you might be moved to say) than the guarded turn to surer yet far less satisfying objects of contemplation. – Ah, but if what Aristophanes describes reveals itself to be the repellent and supremely unlawful desire for a parent, Diotima's counteroffer looks like something you could live with.

One comment from Alcibiades, when he tells of his failed attempt to seduce Socrates, can sound as random as Socrates' overelaboration to Agathon about *erôs* and fathers, and again opposes philosophy to Aristophanic love. Alcibiades tells of having arranged a night with Socrates. They lay down on the couch but passed the night innocently. Only Alcibiades says not that "nothing happened," as modern people do, rather that the night passed as if he had

71 Plato *Symposium* 205e.

72 Plato *Symposium* 210a7–b6. Diotima captures the essential similarity of visible beauty by calling the beauty in one body *adelphon* "kin" – literally "brother, sibling" – to the beauty in another, 210b1. *Pace* Levinas, Socrates, and Diotima do not ward-off sibling-associations as they do relations with a parent.

slept with a "father or older brother."[73] This *means* that nothing happened, and the reader takes for granted that it means nothing happened, because the *erôs* in philosophy – unlike other kinds of *erôs* you could mention – does not incline toward incest.

In another way Diotima sets herself against Aristophanes when she makes reproduction the *telos* of *erôs*, its purpose or end. On this count the story of Aristophanes and the *Phaedrus*'s great speech share a feature that might underlie their other commonalities. Acknowledging that some forms of desire go with sex and reproduction, at least the forms that animals experience, Diotima pictures a man full of *erôs* as if pregnant and seeking a female partner upon whom he can beget his child. Biologically this feels like a man's fantasy about womanhood, visualizing parturition as ejaculation, pregnancy as cause of sex rather than effect of sexual activity. Nevertheless it does make the larger temporal priority clear: love, then childbirth.[74] And that would seem obvious, except that in saying such a thing Diotima is rebuking Aristophanes yet again, and his theory that childbirth comes before *erôs* as its sufficient cause. Diotima's prospective character of *erôs* orients love toward a future birth, while on the retrospective understanding of love birth is the misfortune whose happiest effect will be *erôs* that works to reverse that bad luck. For Aristophanes in the *Symposium* and for Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, being born amounts to undergoing trauma.

How well the *Phaedrus*'s proposal works remains to be seen. The Aristophanic etiology of *erôs,* as I have been saying, condemns all love to the status of depraved and antisocial sexuality; it renders any reproductive effects of desire accidental consequences, and moreover causes of more trauma later. On this score Diotima's plain insistence on love before reproduction, however quirky its account of pregnancy sounds, is a return to sanity.

## Beyond Diotima

If Aristophanes describes the alternative, the only hope for *erôs* is Diotima's kind, even despite her intellectualization of the love impulse and despite the final solitariness that such love promises. She may not offer everything people want from desire, but at least she offers a livable civilized possibility.

Anyway we have to set aside modern "intuitions" about love when deciding whether the *Symposium* offers an exceptional *erôs* to counterweigh the pathology it diagnoses. "Platonic" love for soul rather than body may attract one

73 Plato *Symposium* 219d1.

74 Plato *Symposium* 208e. The image of male *erôs* as a kind of pregnancy finds a more sympathetic interpretation in Reeve (2013, 116), who appeals to the ancient idea of "embryophoric semen" to give Diotima's description a concrete meaning. On Reeve's reading a kind of pregnancy does precede intercourse. Either way desire leads to reproduction.

reader (modern or ancient) and repel another. Some are frankly embarrassed that Diotima presents enthusiasm over knowledge as erotic desire.[75] But whether or not you welcome an *erôs* attached to such objects, you can agree that Diotima has made love something transformative; and then the question will be whether a transformative *erôs* solves the problem posed by Aristophanes.

That Diotima describes an essentially changeable love is clear from the difference between her classification of loves and the classifications that other speakers make. Diotima pictures human beings who love a single beautiful body, those drawn to the beauty in all fine bodies, and so on. For his part Aristophanes appears to anticipate modern classifications of sexual orientation by gender (which is not to say that his analysis truly resembles modern separation into straight and gay[76]). And the two speakers before him, Pausanias and Eryximachus, separate common *erôs* from the heavenly kind. Pausanias's analysis depends on a sharp boundary between vulgar Aphrodite and an Aphrodite of the heavens, while Eryximachus extends the double *erôs* to describe all bodies. No doubt their speeches play off Hesiod's equally settled opposition between two types of *eris* "antagonism."[77]

There are many kinds of love, even many ways of parsing those many kinds. But where the speakers before Socrates sort *erôs* into fixed varieties, he reports a theory in which the crassest desire sublimes itself into the most philosophical. For Pausanias and Eryximachus base and fine kinds of love can both be seen everywhere; we don't have to seek out the exceptional.[78] Diotima recognizes the exclusionary kind of *erôs* that wants a single body: what Aristophanes accounts for with his mythic splitting, and allegorizes as parent-love. But this kind turns into love that a tyrant never feels.

Given such changes in love, though, and even accepting what Diotima presents as its superior manifestations, her account does not quite answer the Aristophanic challenge. Love does not transform itself naturally and so might never produce those exceptional varieties that redeem human *erôs*.

75 Plato *Symposium*: love for soul over body, 210b–c; for knowledge, 210d.

76 Plato *Symposium* 191d–192b. The debate over how well this passage matches gay/straight categories begins with Boswell (1982–1983), Halperin (1990a). The discussion is updated in Corvino (1997).

77 Plato *Symposium*: Pausanias on vulgar and divine Aphrodite, 180d–181a; Eryximachus, 186a–b. Two types of *eris*, Hesiod *Works and Days* 11–26. The punning reference to *eris* is only one of many connections to be found between Hesiodic rumination on strife and Plato's work. Boys-Stones (2010) charts the reuses that Plato makes of Hesiod on *eris*, with specific and polyvalent references to the dialogues' theories of love.

78 Plato *Symposium*: Pausanias explains Athenian courtship separating higher love from lower, 183c–184a; Eryximachus finds both types in human bodies, 186b; charges physician with telling them apart, 186d; finds both types in all human and divine situations, in change of seasons, 187e–188a.

That Diotima teaches *about* desire after all – something that could be said about everyone at this dinner – matters less than desire's own need to be taught. Someone may well pass in natural fashion from *erôs* for a single beautiful body to feel such desire toward all examples of bodily beauty. But many people live whole lives never moving to what Diotima calls the next step, loving the beauty in souls. Apparently acknowledging the rarity of that step and others after it, she says that a lover advances toward more meritorious objects by being *agagein* "led" to them; *paidagôgêthêi* "tutored, taught" as by a pedagogue. "This is the right way to move toward matters erotic, or to be led [*agesthai*]."[79]

What occurs by means of teaching is what does not naturally come to be.[80] As she outlines the progress that an enlightened lover makes, Diotima cautions Socrates (on his own retelling of the lesson), "I don't know that you'd be able to do this." Even under her tutelage he might not achieve philosophical desiring. Such *erôs* is not his birthright in the way that another dialogue makes knowledge about right triangles everyone's birthright, even a slave's. People possess *that* knowledge before their birth and only need to achieve recollection of it.[81]

(The teleology of Diotima's *erôs* that contradicts Aristophanic etiology also tells against the recollection hypothesis. Love causes new births instead of harking back to birth and before.)

If *erôs* responded to something the lover had before being born, it could escape the conditions of Aristophanic incest-love and yet be available to a degree that Diotima does not make it available. Good love would signal a return to your birth and your own nature as bad love does in the story of Aristophanes; only where Aristophanes envisioned birth as the physical beginning of life, it would now appear as the beginning of physical life, interrupting a better before-life the return to which now means something disembodying.

Alcibiades praising Socrates after Diotima has disappeared from the conversation compares Socrates to figurines of Silenus, "which when they are pulled apart in two [*dichade*] show figures of the gods they have inside." This allusion to bodies pulled apart in two recalls Aristophanes and also reproaches him. He had put the gods outside during the bisection and punishing humans;

79 Plato *Symposium*: loving souls, 210b6; being *agagein*, 210c7; *paidagôgêthêi*, 210e3; *agesthai*, 211c1.

80 In the *Republic* the young guardians' education includes intervention in their musical preferences: Plato *Republic* 3.398d–400d. As with philosophical love, pleasure over music depends on one's training.

81 Plato: Socrates maybe unable to achieve full progress, *Symposium* 210a2; slave comes to know geometrical truths, *Meno* 82b–85c; is ready to arrive at knowledge upon giving up his assumption that he knows, *Meno* 84a–b.

what if the Aristophanic explanation of *erôs* and one's truest nature made room for a divinity in the human? Then desire could attach to someone specially suited to oneself while also surpassing human concerns.[82]

The image reproaches Diotima too. In all the splendor of the great beauty she promised to enlightened lovers, she said nothing about divinity within them, much less within Socrates.[83] Here is the opportunity for a new wisdom of Silenus (a wisdom of this new Silenus): how to make the best life the one that doesn't begin with birth, though not with tragedy's defeatism about being mortal, nor the comic-pessimistic version that offers only transgressive escape, instead hopeful for a being before birth and before mortality. Because, as in the other declarations of what is best, it is already too late to have avoided birth, the new wisdom will restate the second-best "die as soon as possible" to "return sooner than anyone else to the immortal condition."

Maybe the *Symposium* hints at the new wisdom in its final scene: Socrates, Aristophanes, and Agathon still awake and drinking. Our informant has lost the thread of the argument. Socrates is saying that one person could write both comedy and tragedy, and then the playwrights fall asleep, but he gets up and bathes and goes about his day.[84]

The argument, if there had ever been one, inspires any number of moves to fill in the gaps. A joking reader might observe that where drunks look at one person and see double,[85] Socrates the essentially sober man can look at two playwrights and see single. Broadly speaking the *Symposium* means to conclude that Agathon has portrayed *erôs* in its divine condition, too high for humans to know, while Aristophanes captured *erôs* as fully human but no better than that. The one person capable of embracing comedy and tragedy alike is the philosopher who, by locating life in the passage from low and merely human to divinely high, encompasses in one vision what tragedy and comedy both approach separately.

Expanding on this last thought I have another one, which I proffer as a reading not of the *Symposium* but of Plato overall. Take what Socrates says to anticipate the speech he will make in the *Phaedrus.* Agathon represented tragedy as the medium that speaks in high rhetorical language. Aristophanes represented comedy as a lively tale of our high-flying previous selves and divine action, and the moment when true lovers rediscover each other after having lost one another at birth. Then the person who commands both

82 Plato *Symposium* 215b3. This is a point where my discussion departs from Nussbaum (1979), who sees the speech of Alcibiades as the resolution of the *Symposium*'s dialectic, where for me it looks ahead to a better theory in the future. On Alcibiades in this dialogue, see Gagarin (1977).

83 On the inadequacy of Diotima's erotic theory as counter to Aristophanes see also Nussbaum (1979, 168).

84 Plato *Symposium* 223d.

85 For an ancient version of the thought that drunks see double take "Aristotle" *Problems* 3.30 875b9–10. To drunks (says the author), a single thing to look at can appear to be many.

tragedy and comedy is once again the philosopher, assuming that the philosopher can speak in high rhetorical language of our previous selves and their happy return to a union that had ended at birth. As long as that speech is possible, philosophy should indeed occupy the position it arrogates to itself at a drinking party, the one that puts forward the last word containing multitudes of others.

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# 2 Telling good love from bad

## *Erôs* in the *Phaedrus*

### The great speech about love

The main speech that Socrates delivers in the *Phaedrus*[1] combines Agathon's rhetoric with freewheeling Aristophanic mythmaking to depict the soul's life before it enters a body, and the manner of its living when embodied. Socrates calls this his "palinode" because it returns to and renounces the speeches preceding it, his and the speech of Lysias, which had portrayed love as bad.[2]

Socrates knows why one might think of *erôs* as bad. His palinode will not gainsay the unfortunate manifestations of love: diseased, as the first two speeches said; beastly; deranged. He only denies that all *erôs* must belong to that unfortunate type. There are manifestations of the impulse – unsung and unsuspected loves – that arise from a rival etiology and follow a contrary trajectory.

The speech works as an answer to Aristophanes as well as to the *Phaedrus*'s other speeches, because Aristophanes too had depicted *erôs* without a thought of transcendence; and inasmuch as Aristophanes had let *erôs* reveal itself as incest. Psychologically acute, the speech of Aristophanes made love low and vicious. The palinode will preserve the thought of a return to your true self while also ennobling that process.

According to the palinode, disembodied life begins in a place above the heavens, where gods steer their chariots in great circuits past the Forms of justice, temperance, and other evaluative predicates. Mortal souls ride after the gods in their own chariots. Eleven gods ride around heaven[3] and each

1 This chapter began as "Telling Good Love from Bad in Plato's *Phaedrus*," which I delivered at Boston College in November 2015, and which was subsequently published as Pappas (2017). I am grateful to the audience that heard this paper at Boston College and replied to it so thoughtfully; above all to Deborah De Chiara-Quenzer for her comment; also very much to C. Wesley DeMarco, Gary Gurtler, Robert Kubala, Marina McCoy, and May Sim.

2 Plato *Phaedrus*: main speech, 246e–247a; palinode, 243a2–b6, 257a3; preceding speeches call love bad, for example, at 231a–d, 232c–d (Lysias's speech); 238e–240a (first speech by Socrates).

3 At *Phaedrus* 246e–247a, Socrates describes gods and followers. Hestia remains home. Zeus leads all other gods and spirits following him "organized into 11 parts," 247a1. This implies that Zeus is followed by everyone divine or human; so there would be 11 groups of charioteers, therefore 11 types of people who fall in love. But later Socrates describes the *erôs* that a follower

mortal soul follows one, so that the companies of bodiless chariots, each chariot drawn by a pair of horses, circle the sloping heavenly ground, all eyes on the Forms as only disembodied eyes can see such things.

The gods ride sure along the steep path, but a mortal soul's horses labor to keep up the pace, and every mortal drives horses one of which is irascible and hard to control. Sometimes a chariot goes off the uphill road without its driver's having glimpsed the eternal truths the sight of which keeps a soul in heaven. Those souls find themselves falling[4] into bodily existence, where they stay for ten cycles of incarnation, one per millennium, until they escape the reiterated deaths and births and return to their places in heaven.

Some souls in bodies remain closer to their first existence and remember more of what they'd taken in. Philosophers, lovers, and *mousikoi* "those inspired by Muses" belong in this highest rank. Tyrants, least memorious of all, belong in the ninth and lowest. What looks like everyone else goes in between: mimetic poets (sixth) and farmers (seventh), doctors (fourth) and the nearest thing ancient Athens had to lawyers (eighth).[5] At some moments the ranking promises to map onto the typology of chariot companies, but they seem to have different purposes, one classification accounting for which people you love and the other for how you will love them.[6] If each soul from a given god's regiment can end up at any one of nine degrees of embodiment, there will be 99 types of soul for philosophical orators to learn about.[7]

But rhetoric comes into play later. Love matters now. Socrates had not spoken of *erôs* in connection with life in heaven, for evidently it presupposed life in a body. Physical beauty strikes the eye. Of all those qualities whose Forms appear to the supercelestial riders, only beauty presents itself to a bodily sense with anything like the effect that a Form has on souls in their chariots. So the erotic reaction to beauty resembles what other dialogues call

of Zeus experiences, as if Zeus led one of the companies *in addition to* the 11 identified as coming after him, 252c4–5. In that case we have 12. Yunis (2011, 140) resolves this question by giving Zeus a double role to play, leading "both the entire host and his own contingent."

4 A word about the fall, lest that word's Christian associations make it seem anachronistic. Socrates says that if the soul "fills with obliviousness and wickedness and grows heavy [*barunthêi*]," then "should fall [*pesêi*] to the earth" (248c6–7), it enters the cycle of reincarnation. My translations from the *Phaedrus* have been guided by the Nehamas and Woodruff (1995) and much informed by Yunis (2011).

5 Plato *Phaedrus*: philosophers etc., 248d3; tyrants, 248e3; poets, 248e1; doctors ("one who heals the body"), 248d5; sophists (as nearest to lawyers), 248e2.

6 Some comments align the two systems of classification. Socrates does say that philosophical lovers – those in the first of the nine ranks – also follow Zeus: Plato *Phaedrus* 252e–253a. But not all the gods' characters map onto all rankings; anyway if Zeus heads all the regiments, his followers must be one type of human but also *the* human type. On the difficulty of squaring the various classifications to one another, see Werner (2012, 86n75).

7 That philosophical rhetoric will render speeches to crowds problematic if not impossible has been worried over by Guthrie (1976), Waterfield (2002, xxxvi), Werner (2012,180n26).

recollection, in that a remarkable sense experience leads the soul to think about – as if to remember – experience from a time before bodies.[8]

Lovers recall more than the bare fact of prebodily existence. Beauty triggers their desire, but they respond with special enthusiasm to those whose souls belonged to the same divine company their own did. When they meet someone who is their type the wing of a lover's soul, another carry-over from disembodied life, emerges from its dormant state, moistening and turgescing with desire. Apollo's devotees love an Apollonian soul, Zeus-types love Jovians, and so on. The lovers, whom this speech envisions as older (and male) and philosophically more advanced, cultivate the qualities in the (also male) younger objects of their love that both of them owe to the god they'd once followed.[9]

What Socrates calls *anterôs* "counter-love, love in return" takes a lover's attraction beyond one-sided infatuation. The loved one does not experience a full answering *erôs* toward the lover, but rather feels *anterôs* that resembles an echoing likeness of the original love. Despite the answering love's lesser strength, it suffices to join the two as a couple, and they spend a long time together, even years. They keep themselves from consummating their love sexually, although at times the desire grows sharp. If they manage to feel the erotic desire without yielding, they can hasten their escape from the reincarnational cycle, returning for good to heaven after three embodied lives instead of the customary ten.[10] Unable to undo having been born, they will escape mortal existence after 3000 years, not exactly "dying soon" as Silenus had recommended mortals do, but still reachieving sooner than anyone else the state now understood as the real purpose of dying.

## Love and prenatal life

Plato's dialogues contain other myths about what becomes of a soul outside its body. These myths appear in (significantly, at the *ends* of) Plato's *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic*, foretelling punishment or reward and the types of reincarnation that occur after bodily death. Because they thematize life's virtues and vices, these three are referred to as "myths of judgment."[11] The *Phaedrus*'s palinode touches on judgment and reincarnation,[12] but treats those

8 Plato: beauty strikes eye, *Phaedrus* 250a–d, especially 250d; recollection of "true" beauty, 249d5–6; of "beauty itself," 250e2; *anamnêsis* "recollection" in other dialogues, *Meno* 81c–d, *Phaedo* 72e–73b. See Werner (2012, 82).

9 Plato *Phaedrus*: wing grows with desire, 251b–d; people love their type, 252c–e; cultivate gods' qualities in beloved, 253b–c.

10 Plato *Phaedrus*; counter-love, 255e1; couple spends years together, 256b; refrains from consummating love, 256a–c; returning to heaven early, 249a with 256b–d.

11 For instance in Annas (1982).

12 Plato *Phaedrus* 248e–249b. What Socrates says here reads like a synopsis of the *Republic*'s myth of Er. Souls are judged, rewarded, or punished for a millennium, then made to choose their next human or animal life.

experiences as moments within a grander cosmic story. Justice rendered for a life's actions is very well in its place, but that place is now seen as a parenthesis or interruption in the process of achieving liberation from bodily existence and return to a daily chariot ride unlike almost anything that happens on earth.

As the only member of Plato's eschatological genre to address the cause of *erôs*, the myth's narrative departure in reaching back to a prior disembodied life signals that this difference in subject matter will account for its difference in purpose. Love can only be accounted for (as it had been for Aristophanes) by appeal to a distant past. This distant past of the individual, for which Diotima's speech offers no parallel, accounts for the two love-theories' contrary takes on beauty and pedagogy. Diotima made true beauty the terminus of philosophical advancement and final sight for the luckiest erotic man; it is the first thing a soul perceives in the *Phaedrus*, cause not effect of erotic yearning.

The *Phaedrus*'s lovers still have much to learn, though less about beauty than about the divine types they resemble and need to assimilate themselves to. Even so it is striking that Socrates says they learn *hothen an ti dunôntai* "from anywhere they can," any source or cause that might enlighten them; that he says they pursue their practice of enlightenment *autoi* "themselves, on their own," seeking the nature of their mutual god *par'heautôn* "with what they have, by their own devices." They learn but no one teaches them.[13]

The story of the prenatal ride also lets Socrates diagnose the moment that made love possible, as Diotima never tries to but Aristophanes insists on doing. As in the tale of Aristophanes, you love the one from whom the birth-trauma parted you. In place of the Aristophanic violent separation from another body, the myth proposes a birth trauma that is violent insertion into body. Because of this difference, love leads not back to a particular body but to a kinship among souls that you enjoyed before your embodiment. A lucky difference, a morally palatable consequence. And on these terms love can again become what people frequently experience when they fall in love, namely a reunion with what they had already known and who they'd been.

The contrast between the two birth-traumas does not remain as elegant as the difference between parting from a body and entering one. For Aristophanes' etiology of *erôs* is also recalled in the comment that the soul loses its wing when it leaves heaven.[14] Either way we can speak of a birth-trauma, and both images permit a close analogy to the story of Aristophanes. Indeed you might suspect Plato of having cast embodiment as wing-loss in

13 Plato *Phaedrus* 252e4–253a2. Yunis translates: "having taken up [the practice], they learn from any source they can and pursue [it] on their own, and hunting with their own means to discover the nature of their god," Yunis (2011, 157). On this point also see Werner (2012, 73) who reads the *Phaedrus*'s "leading" of the soul as the act of "encouraging it to *move* itself" (emphasis in original).

14 Plato *Phaedrus* 246c–d. Werner (2012, 81) speaks of the "primordial loss or *wound*" (emphasis in original) that birth now represents. I would add that the word "wound" applies rightly to this loss of wing, as to what the ancient double-people experience in Aristophanes' story. Diotima's theory of love, despite her emphasis on "lack" in those who love, has no room for wound or injury.

order to revive and rehabilitate the poignant myth of Aristophanes. Whatever the motive may have been, the image works against an easy symmetry between souls and bodies. The embodied soul is not just an instance of psychic substance conjoined with a corresponding instance of bodily substance, because something less than the true soul occupies a body. The bodily is the realm of incompleteness. It's something only *dokoun* "seeming" to move itself.[15]

That exceptional *erôs* that solves the world's problem with love will (on the one hand) have to be recognized as divine. The soul before birth saw *hiera* "sacred objects," and it is remembrance of those sacred things that connects a soul with what makes even a god divine.[16] The love idea is still a crazy one ("being with you is how things ought to be and how things always have been," etc.), but sometimes also something not spoken of before: *holy-crazy.* Attaining for a moment the inspiration that Homer assumed, Socrates discloses the true name of *erôta* to be *pterôta* "wing-love." The epics contain examples of different divine names for things from the names that humans call those things, and elsewhere Plato draws attention to the phenomenon.[17] Here the gods' name for love implies that when humans talk about love they don't know what they're saying.

More precisely, human beings lack words for what desire ought to be but rarely is. When people once experience love of the holy–crazy variety they will understand and use the right name for it.

Recognizing love's madness in holy form however requires telling the difference between earthly and divine. In the absence of perfect parallelism between those domains – so between soul and body – the world of embodiment will need to find the part of itself that abuts the divine. The possibility of exceptional *erôs* calls for an exceptionalism within the body, thus for the body to be not a unity but somehow open. To read the *Phaedrus* as antidote to the sickness of love as Aristophanes conceived it in the *Symposium*, then Lysias and Socrates himself in this dialogue's other speeches, is to ask about the way it imagines the sacred as a demarcated portion of the mundane (if in fact such things can be imagined, as opposed to only taken to be imagined).

## Detecting the divine

Socrates has a feel for the holy.[18] Would you say a nose for it? That would be a species of misstatement or misunderstanding, although what exactly is being misstated in reference to the sacred can be hard to spell out.

15 Plato *Phaedrus* 246c3.

16 Plato *Phaedrus*: *hiera*, 250a4; makes a god divine, 249c4–5.

17 Murray (1981) distinguishes between the inspiration that Homer requests from the Muse, which brings him information other mortals lack, and the possessed state the dialogues transform inspiration into. But at times, the Muses supply information to Socrates; see *Republic* 8.545d. "Wing-love," *Phaedrus* 252b. On Homer's knowing the gods' vocabulary see Plato *Cratylus* 391d and examples at 391e (from *Iliad* 20.74), 392a (from *Iliad* 14.291, 2.813).

18 I am grateful to Gary Gurtler for pressing me on this particular.

As far as the feeling is concerned, consider a moment when Socrates and Phaedrus have settled themselves to talk about *erôs*, after a walk in the Athenian exterior. (Not *quite* the exterior, this being still part of Athens; but they are outside the city walls. They are in the part of Athens that has been designated something beyond Athens.[19]) Socrates embarks on his first speech about love but interrupts himself. Doesn't it seem that he is experiencing a *theion* "divine" passion? This place they have come to is *theios*, a holy place.[20]

An apt thought, for *erôs* is a god, and if you want to produce a theory about love you will need an eye or ear for godly things. Socrates had a reputation around Athens for hearkening to a *daimonion* "godly" sign that came to him. Although precedents existed for sightings of *daimones*, Athenians found the sign peculiar; to Socrates' friends its peculiarity proved that he enjoyed divine protection. Even his execution could be reinterpreted to cohere with this trust in his protected status, either judged a not-bad occurrence or inferred to be the sign's will.[21]

Later in antiquity authors continued to speculate: that *phônê* "voice" referred to a vision; or that Socrates heard something, probably speech or argument, otherwise maybe a sneeze that urged him onward if he heard it from the right, deterred him if from the left.[22] Anyway something comes to Socrates and turns him around. According to the dialogues the sign gets him to philosophize, most dramatically here in the *Phaedrus*, when he has finished the speech about *erôs* that he comes to regret, then stands up to cross the river and head home again. What he calls his "customary godly sign [*sêmeion*]" strikes him and turns him back and ushers in all the rest of the *Phaedrus*.[23]

Socrates' deference to the sign resembles traditional piety. If the suggestion is right that the sign as prohibition came as a sneeze from *aristera* "the left," he is carrying on an old Greek reading of sneezes, although his treatment of the sign as private doubtless fueled speculation (which became the legal charge) that he introduced *daimonia kaina* "new *daimonion* spirits, new deities" to Athens. Socrates does not exhibit the mechanical response visible in superstition today and visible in the past. According to Aristotle's student Theophrastus, the superstitious type would hear owls and exclaim "Great Athena!" or see stones heaped at a crossroad and pour oil over them: would

19 See Werner (2012, 21). On the location of their conversation as identified archeologically, see Travlos (1971, 112–113, 204–205, 289–291).

20 Plato *Phaedrus* 238c4–7.

21 Plato: Euthyphro knew about the sign despite not being a friend, *Euthyphro* 3b3–4; Socrates on trial told jury about it, *Apology* 31c6–d4; Pythagoreans on seeing *daimones*, Apuleius *De Deo Socratis* chapter 20 (=Aristotle fragment 193). Execution not bad, Plato *Apology* 40a3–d2; the will of the sign, Xenophon *Apology* 4ff. On the sign's philosophical worth see Destrée and Smith (2005) and Jelinek (2015).

22 Socrates' voice, Plato *Apology* 31d2; vision, Apuleius *De Deo Socratis* chapter 20; Plutarch *On the Daimonion of Socrates*: the sign a *logos*, 588c–d; sneeze, 581a–b. See Long (2009).

23 Plato *Phaedrus* 242b7–8. The sign also turns Socrates back – as it happens, toward philosophical dispute; thus perhaps positively – at Plato *Euthydemus* 272e2–3.

react without thinking, in other words, not interpreting the event as Socrates does ("I must have been speaking ill of *Erôs* the god"). Similarly although Socrates heeds his dreams as his pious contemporaries did, he does not run to a soothsayer in the manner of the superstitious man but works out its meaning for himself.[24]

The Socratic alertness to divinity first appears in this dialogue in response to Phaedrus, who has a taste for the skeptical treatment of old myths. (A difficulty for his sense of divinity is implied there too.) Walking through the countryside they pass the spot where Boreas god of the north wind is said to have seized the Athenian girl Oreithuia. "Tell me Socrates," Phaedrus says, "do you believe this story is true?"[25]

"If I disbelieved it the way the wise do, I wouldn't be *atopos*," Socrates says. What is *atopos*, lacking a *topos* "place," is what stands out and does not belong; is outlandish. Believing those tales has something irregular about it. To reinforce the point he presently calls myths *atopiai* "absurdities." People are always saying Socrates is *atopôtatos* "most exceedingly strange," as Phaedrus will soon do in this conversation, and as Socrates explains others' saying in the *Theaetetus*.[26]

As if he might escape that characterization – as if he were perfectly regular; as if there were a normal place for him – Socrates imagines how he'd rationalize the story about Boreas. A gust of wind blew the young woman off a cliff. He resists the temptation (in other words would just as soon remain *atopos*) for he has better things to do than go through every myth replacing godly acts with natural happenstances. His question turns inward. Is he wild as the earthborn monster Typho was said to be, or is he some other creature tame and simple?[27]

The reply might seem designed to impress Phaedrus, tossing off an easy skeptical reduction of the myth and then right away disavowing it. Socrates sounds like a seducer at times in the *Phaedrus*; and in general it can be hard to tell the difference. One uses about the same words to pray as to seduce, and an

24 Traditional piety in sign, Yunis (2011, 122). Old reading of sneezes: Homer *Odyssey* 17.541, Xenophon *Anabasis* 3.2.9; "Aristotle" *Problems* 33.7. In this last, the author asks whether a sneeze is *theion* (unlike a cough) by virtue of coming from the head, "the most divine part of us." See Nesselrath (2010, 89n102); on sneezing see Johnston (2008a, 130–131). Socrates and *daimonia kaina*, Plato *Apology* 24c1. Theophrastus *Superstitiousness* (*Characters* 16): "Great Athena!" 8; oil on stone, 5; dream to soothsayer, 11. On dreams of Socrates see Plato *Crito* 44b, where he perversely reads a dream about going to Phthia (in Thessaly) as a prediction of his death, then argues against going to Thessaly; *Phaedo* 60e–61a, a recurring dream-command to "make music" that he reads as referring to philosophizing.

25 Plato *Phaedrus* 229c3–4. For similar skepticism see 275b3–4, where Phaedrus laughs off Socrates' invention of Egyptian stories, and earns a rebuke about focusing on the moral of the story.

26 Plato *Phaedrus*: wouldn't be *atopos*, 229c5–6; mythic *atopiai*, 229e1; Socrates, *atopôtatos*, 230c5. On that judgment in the *Theaetetus* see Chapter 7.

27 Plato *Phaedrus* 229d3–230a6.

eavesdropper might hear either intent at work, as people hear different lyrics in a song ("got a ticket to ride" vs. "got a tic in her eye").

In refusing to collude in rationalizing theory Socrates takes a stand like the one he describes in Plato's *Phaedo*, when he declines the materialism of Anaxagoras. An expositor of myth-rationalization in the generation after Aristotle was Palaephatus; he must have had antecedents who persuaded Phaedrus, unless Plato is writing (as he sometimes did) a much later debate into the remembered past of this conversation. In the *Phaedo* Socrates wants a good causal account to make room for moral action, while in the *Phaedrus* he opposes myth-debunking to the internalizing application of mythological images for moral self-knowledge.[28]

The parallel to the *Phaedo* suggests another similarity. In response to Anaxagoras, Socrates says he will not rest with the simple causal picture he'd been using but needs to expand upon it. And now in the *Phaedrus*, having dismissed rationalizing accounts of the old myths, Socrates seeks an alternative besides the two that his time's discussions have plans for. Socrates will not reject naturalistic myth-debunking in favor of the existing myths. The religious conservatism that responded *that* way would preserve the mythic as the mythic has been known thus far. And *that* mythic is not the same as the divine that Socrates has a taste for. Typho is mythic, but Socrates hopes not to uncover Typho within himself. Typho came out of the earth and Socrates has turned his attention to heaven, where "heaven" now names a more elevated location for divinity, Socrates' new topography of being marking off the place beyond being.

Boreas does not belong in that place any more than Typho does. Despite Socrates' discouraging Phaedrus from undoing Boreas into wind, this erotic divinity will not show the way to divine *erôs.* The tradition credits him with outsize beastly love: In Athens he seized Oreithuia by force; Homer said that Boreas had sired 12 colts with the mares of Erichthonius, and Plato will add (putting Homer in his place) that horses represent erotic impulses present in the human but less than the human can be.[29]

The tradition as Socrates finds it celebrates Boreas for the brutality in his *erôs* – and so much the worse for the tradition. Socrates refers to an altar to Boreas that the Athenians had built; Plato would have known that the city believed Boreas to have rescued them in 480, when at the turning point of the Persian War (before the naval battle at Salamis) a storm near Thessaly destroyed much of the Persian fleet. Oreithuia being a daughter of Athens, her rapist becomes the city's *gambros* "son-in-law." Such is godly love as people have honored it. For in fact, as Karim Arafat proposes, the rape of

28 See Plato *Phaedo* 97b–99d. On Palaephatus and the rationalization of myth see Chapter 8; on the rationalizing tendency in Greece see Morgan (2000, 62–67, 98–105).

29 On the sexuality of Boreas see Werner (2012, 43n25); sired 12 colts, Homer *Iliad* 20.223–225. This is not the Athenian Erichthonius but precursor to the Trojan royal family. On horses as irrational human drives see Plato *Phaedrus* 246a, 247b, 253d, 255e–256a.

Oreithuia would have been seen not as an embarrassing further act by an otherwise admirable deity, but as further manifestation of the behavior that the Athenians admired and thanked that deity for. Not to put too fine a point on it, Boreas fucked those Persians. He's a fucker. It is in character for him to have abducted Oreithuia.[30]

Even this splendid spot that Socrates and Phaedrus arrive at reminds those familiar with traditional divinity about the danger in *erôs*. Socrates takes pious note of the shrines. He calls his fluency in speech the work of nymphs. Later he hears the chirp of cicadas as a tribute to benevolent Muses.[31] But as Bruce Thornton observes, the great erotic abductions of Greek mythology occurred in such bucolic settings. Hades burst out of the ground to seize Persephone from a beautiful floral meadow. While Creusa picked crocuses, Apollo came to rape her.

Socrates mentions the *platanos* "plane tree" under which he and Phaedrus are sitting, and we might smile at the echo of Plato's name in the tree's. But if we can trust the testimony of later authors, it was under a plane tree that Zeus raped Europa.[32]

Where the *Phaedo*'s Socrates speaks of his "second sailing in quest of cause" that gives a sharper or shrewder answer to "Why is this hot?" than the sure but ignorant answer "from the heat in it,"[33] the *Phaedrus* finds him looking for a more respectable myth of *erôs* than standbys about rampant erotic aggression. A philosophical myth will not invite the same rationalizing explanations: Boreas as heedless overpowering rapist deserves to be accounted for as heedless overpowering north wind, given that he brings nothing more to the story as a god than the bodily world already knows about himself. As commentators on the *Phaedrus* have said, Plato recognizes the "power" or "authoritativeness" of the old Greek tales but seeks to give them a newly conceived meaning. The gods become "exemplars of philosophical activity"; when Ganymede's name comes up later in the *Phaedrus,* the old story of his rape has been "recast as the model of divine *erôs*."[34]

The new myth that escapes what is in the end the earthiness of old myths will be able to describe an *erôs* that does not fall back into the bodily attachment Aristophanes detailed and the attachment, degraded even by bodily standards,

30 The altar, Plato *Phaedrus* 229c. Herodotus *Histories*: storm near Thessaly, 7.189.1–3; Boreas *gambros*, 7.189.2. In an animalistic sense Homer had already made Boreas son-in-law of Erichthonius (Arafat 2002).

31 Plato *Phaedrus*: Socrates notes the shrines, 238c–d; benevolent Muses, 258e–259d.

32 Thornton (1997, 4). Persephone picking flowers, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 5–14; Creusa picking crocuses, Euripides *Ion* 889 ff.; Socrates under plane tree, Plato *Phaedrus* 229a; Zeus and Europa under plane tree, Theophrastus *History of Plants* 1.9.3, Pliny *Natural History* 12.5.

33 Plato *Phaedo*: "second sailing," 99d1; shrewder answer, 105c1–2.

34 The old tales' "power," Yunis (2011, 92); "authoritativeness," Werner (2012, 160). Gods' "philosophical activity," Werner (2012, 120). Ganymede mentioned, Plato *Phaedrus* 255c1–2; rape of in tradition, *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 202–217; the tale "recast," Yunis (2011, 164).

that comes *sotto voce* from his story. The challenge for Socrates will be to articulate the philosophical topography. He needs to turn Phaedrus toward a divine realm unlike those that Greek myths had spoken of, therefore a realm he can't use existing mythic words to identify.

## Charting the path to knowledge of divinity

How do you keep the divine in view and still maintain some distance from the compromised divinity found in the mythological tradition? After they have settled themselves to talk, Socrates will seek out what he can call rightly divine in *erôs*, having been chastised by the godly voice or the sneeze on his left into delivering a proper praise to love.

Socrates mock introduces his great speech as the work of the recanting poet Stesichorus, whom he calls the son of "Euphemus," in other words, the son of the auspicious thing to say, the good omen.[35] Stesichorus will be the father of this speech; and in accord with the Greek practice of naming a first son after his father's father, this *logos* itself may be called a euphemism, in the sense of being the propitious thing to say about love.

For Socrates the first announcement to make when speaking propitiously of divinities is that *mania* "madness" is not always bad. He will not slander the work of gods, and when madness has been divinely bestowed it brings mortals the greatest goods: poetic inspiration, prophecy, purification, love. Deranged as these can seem, they are all capable of being crazed in the right way, thereby (when good) bearing the mark of divine benefaction. Although his ranking of souls implies that people and their desires differ in degree, some having seen more of "the truths" and others less,[36] this opening disjunction requires the divinity to be either present or a lover or not.

That the distinction between madnesses is absolute is reinforced by the later explanation Socrates gives. Looking back on his palinode in the methodological section of the dialogue, Socrates reiterates his analysis of crazes.[37] The great speech succeeded. He and Phaedrus found two *eidê* "species, kinds" of madness, one caused by human illness and the other *theia* "divine." No longer poetizing or mythologizing, Socrates still draws the same distinction.

35 Plato *Phaedrus* 244a2. On Stesichorus see West (1971). Euphemus as father of Stesichorus is probably a Platonic invention, hence emphasized here (Yunis 2011, 130).

36 Plato *Phaedrus*: rankings 248c-d; *tôn alêthôn* "of the truths," 248c4. Yunis (2011, 141) writes that the Greek *alêthaia* "is not 'truth' (epistemological sense) but 'the true nature of things' (metaphysical sense)." It would follow from his more careful rendering that one can take in more or less of such realities, whereas "truths" would have to be either grasped as true or not.

37 In some particulars, this second look at the taxonomy differs from the first. Most important is that Socrates had begun by distinguishing *four* types of divine *mania*. But such discrepancies do not alter the fundamental agreement that madness has good and bad forms. That the two-place distinction of love as divine or diseased is not tangential to the analysis is also suggested by its appearance, in just these terms, in Gorgias *Encomium of Helen* 19.

The rest of the speech was playful, but not the difference between divine and mundane kinds of madness.[38]

In retrospect (acknowledging that the palinode had artistry in it, probably madness behind it), Socrates admits that they came upon the dialectical method by chance. It would not be bad to have a *technê* "professional skill" to accomplish what they had done luckily.[39] A dialectical *technê* brings together all specimens of some type and then proceeds to divide them at the joints.[40] Reinforcing the point he'd made rhetorically, Socrates repeats the palinode's opening distinction. A dialectical *technê* would do what the speech already did do, namely set bad madness (the product of diseases) aside from the good kind that bespeaks divine "change of customary norms"; then would discover *erôs* among the other maddened states, both the good kind in divine madness and the diseased kind in the madness that is disease.[41]

Dialectic could then distinguish as philosophical truth what the great speech described in its enthusiasm. Up to a point the nine grades of embodiment will permit the same bifurcatory analysis. The person in the top rank inspired by Muses sounds like the inspired poet in whom Socrates identified divine madness, while the ordinary (mimetic) poet belongs sixth.[42] Certainly the top and bottom extremes correspond to the distinction between divine and sick *erôs*, the "erotic" soul in the top rank experiencing god-given love if anyone does, while the tyrant in the ninth rank will feel and act upon a love that gods disavow.[43]

The erotic reading of the tyrant is not Plato's invention. Tyranny meant deviant sexuality in Greece, as the preceding chapter showed with the tales of Oedipus and Periander. A historical example from nearer Plato's time was the elder Dionysius of Syracuse, who arranged a near-incestuous tangle of unions among his relatives, marrying two of his daughters to his brothers and one to his son. Perhaps before all the others came Laius, who as father of Oedipus may be said to have introduced the essence of tyranny to Athenians, and who instigated the horrors associated with his dynasty when he raped young Chrysippus. These sexual obsessions among tyrants, signs of their wrong kind of craziness, imply that the skill of distinguishing divinely mad

38 Plato *Phaedrus*: benefits of *mania*, 244a6–8; kinds of divine madness, 244b1–245b1; two general kinds, 265a10–11; the rest playful, 265c8–9.

39 Plato *Phaedrus*: found this distinction by chance, 265d1; nice to have had *technê*, 265d2.

40 Plato *Phaedrus*: brings together cases, 265d; divides kinds, 265e, *kat'arthra* "at the joints," 265e1.

41 Plato *Phaedrus*: madness of *nosêma* "disease," 265a10; good madness, 265a11; "change of customary norms," Yunis (2011, 194); love-types in the madness-types, 266a–b.

42 Plato *Phaedrus*: *mousikos* "inspired by Muses," 248d2; on inspired poets, see 245a. Yunis (2011, 144) makes all the words for the top rank join together in describing the philosopher, but the *Phaedrus*'s talk of Muses does not justify this move. Ordinary poet in sixth rank, 248e1.

43 Plato *Phaedrus*: erotic soul, 248d3; tyrant, 248e2; compare to brutal lover, 250e–251a.

souls from those that are mad in a bad sense should apply directly to telling a tyrant from a philosopher.[44]

The *Phaedrus*'s dialectical analysis finds extended illustrations in Plato's *Sophist* and *Statesman*, where subdivision again is bisection – normally two species per genus – as in Socrates' palinode. For instance the *Statesman* puts the method to work distinguishing constitutional forms from one another, monarchy from tyranny and aristocracy from oligarchy. In the latter case, constitutions in which few govern, "We call the one with a good name [*euônumos*] aristocracy; and there is oligarchy."[45] The "good name" is true very literally about aristocracy, because there's no better word than *aristos* "best." So *aristokratia* "sovereignty of the best" is as good a name as a constitutional form could have.

Dialectical division thus finds the difference between political forms that superficially resemble each other. Separating divine *mania* from its diseased double is what this dialectical practice was made to do.

The word *euônumos* also has a religious sense, suggesting "good omen" as *euphêmos* does, and we are back at the task of detecting the divine. And if the divine is not marked by its appearance in received stories of divinity, where will we find it?

## Marking off the divine

Philosophy's heavenly region calls for an ontological separation not normally found in rite and myth, and very much not in the densely populated Greek myths whose characters might live up a mountain, in a forest, or as the blowing wind. The great speech in the *Phaedrus* seeking to identify such a region posits an existence above heaven where souls ride: Socrates calls it "this *topos*," place; no one yet has properly honored the *huperouranion topon* "place above heaven" but he will try to; and in his effort he speaks of the "*topos* outside" where the soul-charioteers' heads peek, as well as of the *ouranion tina topon,* "some heavenly region," where it appears that virtuous nonphilosophers go after they die to be rewarded before returning to bodily life.[46]

The metaphor applies in a more strained way than it first appears to. All that *topos* really means is "space." But then space is the place for bodies not for souls. Before the dialogue's conversation really begins, for example, we are told that Socrates and Phaedrus come to a fragrant *topos* where they recline on the grassy slope pitching down to a stream. *That* you could say is a literal *topos* and holds the men's bodies, so that (as often happens) the mental or psychic and the divine show themselves as figurative versions of what is

44 Intermarriages in family of Dionysius: Plutarch *Life of Dion* 6.1; on Laius and Chrysippus, "Apollodorus" *Library* 3.5.5, Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 13.79.

45 Plato *Statesman*: separating constitutional forms, 291d–e; *euônumos* one is aristocracy, 302d.

46 Plato *Phaedrus*: this *topos*, 247d1; *huperouranion*, 247c4; *topos* outside, 248a2; *ouranion topon*, 249a6.

discovered in experience. The two are parallel and remain apart if not at odds. So what do we do with the information that *this* fragment of the earthly *topos* is also the portion that Socrates sat down in and called divine? He thanks the *entopious theous* "gods of this *topos*" for elevating the rhetoric in their discourses about love.[47] It is not the earthbound nonsacred parallel to the heavenly area but already a little heavenly itself.

It now seems that a place can belong to the literal region from which we distinguish heavenly places and yet also house divinities as places on earth mostly do not. When Socrates pictures the invention of writing in Egypt he has the god Theuth bring his new technology to Thamus, a king of Egypt worshiped as the god Ammon and living in the *ano topos* "upper region" of that country.[48] Egypt lies on the surface of the same earth that Greece is on, yet Thamus is a god in a godly place.

Separating two kinds of place, literal and metaphorical, will not cover all the appearances of place in the *Phaedrus*. What is divine in a *topos* does not belong exclusively on one plane or the other, because it registers a section of literal space that tends toward the outer region. The divine is that other type of *topos* and also part of this one, and Socrates seems intent on taking the idea both ways.

The literal place where they've sat down is holy, for instance. Socrates adduces the statues that he and Phaedrus see around them. From Bronze Age Greece through classical antiquity, statuary and stone grave markers connected human beings with unseen forces. A *kolossos* fixed in earth was thought to stop the wandering souls of the dead, or an effigy would be buried when the body was unavailable.[49] Statues and figurines connected mourners to their lost loved ones.[50] Tombstones and the sculptures on them facilitated communication with chthonic forces, whether the living treated the grave marker as if it were the dead person[51] or inscribed curses on strips of lead

47 Plato *Phaedrus*: fragrant *topos* where they recline, 230b3, 230c1; divine place, 238d1; *entopious theous*, 262d4. All told it is a scene to study closely. Socrates suddenly shifts to elevated style (Thesleff 1967). Phaedrus remarks on Socrates' excited language, calling him "marvelous" and "absurd [*atopôtatos*]," 230c–d. Classical Greek writings rarely called a natural scene *kalos* "beautiful," a word that – alone and in compounds – Socrates uses three times in this short description of their spot. The staginess and effusiveness of the speech invites comparison with Socrates' later depiction of the *topos* beyond heaven. They are resting on an incline, 230c2–4; in heaven the horses ride on sloping ground, 247b. Near them Socrates notices votive figures and statues that make the area *hieron* "sacred," 230b6–7; souls in heaven saw what they could of *hiera* "sacred objects," 250a4.

48 Plato *Phaedrus* 274d3.

49 The first source to consult is Bremmer (2013). On general practices, see Vernant (2006a, 2006b); also Faraone (1991). On burying effigy in place of unavailable corpse, see Herodotus *Histories* 6.58.

50 Euripides *Alcestis* 348–356; also the lost *Protesilaus* of Euripides. For the story, see Ovid *Heroides* 13 and discussion in Fulkerson (2002).

51 Burkert (1985, 193–194). Collins (2003, 38n94) cites Pausanias *Description of Greece* 10.24.6, on the stone at Delphi that Pausanias observed being treated this way.

and burying them near tombs.[52] And, as Plato himself acknowledges, people addressed prayers to cult statues hoping for contact with the divine power in them. Sensational stories report on the sculptures of gods that one possessed for such a purpose.[53]

Statuary bridges the gap between the present and the invisible, being part of the body's world and yet occupying another one. This is one reason the early Christian Clement of Alexandria will condemn the Greeks for their illogical worship of images.[54]

Socrates harps on the subject of cultic statuary. He cites Midas's tomb, whose inscription implies the figure of a *parthenos* "maiden" communicating with passersby. He says that a besotted lover would (if not for the thought that he'd be taken for a lunatic) sacrifice to the loved one "as to a statue [*agalmati*] and a god."[55] Here the loved one's body as a whole constitutes a sacred place, enabling the contact with divinity for which you otherwise might go to a statue.

Phaedrus joins in with a promise he makes twice, pleading with Socrates to extemporize a speech about love. In exchange for the speech he will dedicate a statue of Socrates! Life-sized and golden – first he says it will go up at Delphi, then at Olympia – this *eikôn* "likeness" of Socrates will stand (if at Olympia) next to the beaten-gold *anathêma* "statue, votive offering" that was dedicated there by the sons of Cypselus.[56] In either place the hypothetical statue would stand on sacred ground. At Olympia the nearby *anathêma*, at times an object of controversy, was known as a *kolossos*.[57]

To invoke not merely sculpture but the statuary of cult and divination brings home the question about place, which is also a puzzle about bodies. How can it be that the bodily world stands opposed to divinity yet contains sites and markers that tend toward a divine realm? Logically it would seem

52 Luck (1985, 18), Gager (1992), Graf (1997, 131–135), and Johnston (2008b, 14–20). Plato *Laws* 11.933b describes the practice of producing *kêrina mimêmata peplasmena* "molded wax likenesses" and inserting them in ancestral tombs.

53 Plato *Laws* 11.931a1–3; Heraclitus (DK 22B5) complains about the practice. See Herodotus *Histories* 6.61.3 on prayer to statue of Helen. Possessing the sculpture of a god: Herodotus tells of picking up figures of the sons of Aeacus to aid the Greek side against Persia: *Histories* 8.64.2, 8.83.2. For other examples see Faraone (1992) and Tanner (2001).

54 Clement *Protrepticus pros Hellênas* "protreptic address to the Greeks," for example, 1.4, 4.40. See Pappas (forthcoming).

55 Plato *Phaedrus*: *parthenos*, 264d2–5; sacrificing to loved one, 251a5–6, 252d5–e1.

56 Plato *Phaedrus*: *eikôn* at Delphi, 235d6–7; statue at Olympia, 236b3. An *anathêma* could be just a statue; for its meaning as religious dedication see Herodotus on *anathêmata* of Gyges at Delphi, *Histories* 1.14.1. Dedication from sons of Cypselus, Strabo *Geography* 8.3.30, Plutarch *On the Pythian Oracle* 13, Pausanias *Description of Greece* 5.2.3. On disputes associated with that statue, see Gagné (2016).

57 The statue is called *kolossos* by "Longinus" *On the Sublime* 36.3. The ninth-century Photius reports an epigram on the statue in which it refers to itself as *kolossos*: *Lexicon* 195.4, entry *Kupselidôn anathêma.* The later *Suda* entry *Kupselidôn anathêma en Olumpiai* reports the same inscription. On the epigram and sources see Gagné (2016, 68–69).

that the bodily world cannot both be separate from the divine world and also contain divinities. The dialogue's philosophical religion denies exceptional cases; but the exceptional *erôs* must occur within an exceptional body or body part.

## The most divine part

It takes *kallos* "beauty" to turn an embodied soul to thoughts of higher beings. "There is not enough shine or glow [*pheggos*] in the likenesses here of justice, self-control, and the other things prized by a soul," Socrates says. By comparison we find beauty's gleam clearest "through our clearest sense"; for *opsis* "eyesight, the sense of sight" is the sharpest or keenest of the body's senses.[58]

In English we don't ordinarily say you can look at my sense of sight (except as an optometrist does), because "sight" refers to an immaterial faculty or process. The Greek *opsis* could mean the physical eyeball, a thing that can be seen. The Hippocratic *On Prognosis*, which has been dated to a time in or before Plato's adulthood, uses *opsis* to refer to the eyeball or pupil. And when Xenophon's *Symposium* says that every *opsis* was drawn to beautiful Autolycus "just as a light shining at night leads all eyes [*ommata*] to it," the dramatic scene and grammatical parallel both imply eyes turning in heads.[59] Thus when Socrates calls vision sharp he uses a word that could be taken somatically.

The word needs that bodily overtone. The palinode is explaining how souls in bodies, souls that have "come here," can hope to reach into their first knowledge and reachieve what they once knew. For this purpose the eye is part of the body and also a point of contact with sacred objects that outshine body.

The *Republic* will dwell on vision's ambiguities when Socrates attempts to foresee an as-yet-invisible city.[60] The *Republic* does not draw attention to the physical eyes. But we find Plato's *Timaeus* calling the human head the *theiotaton* "most divine" part of the human body and master of all other parts, with a sense of the head's special status that is perhaps obscurely indicated in the *Phaedrus*. For by way of telling Phaedrus "I followed your lead" in thrilling to Lysias's speech (I loved it the way you did; I was with you getting excited), Socrates says he shared the Bacchic ecstasy *meta sou tês theias kephalês* "with your divine head" or "with you as my divine head." The phrase is only a figure of speech, with head "a synecdoche for 'person.'" But the *Timaeus* makes the thought something as close to medical doctrine as the Platonic dialogues contain. The neck shields the soul that is in the head from the mortal parts housed further below. As Timaeus visualizes the embodied

58 Plato *Phaedrus*: not enough shine, 250b2; our clearest senses, 250d2–3.

59 Hippocrates *On Prognosis*: *opsis* gummy, 2; darting, 7. On dates for Hippocratic treatises, see Jouanna (1999, 373–416). Beautiful Autolycus, Xenophon *Symposium* 1.9.

60 See Chapter 5 on the myth of Er and two ways in which vision works or fails to, both in that myth and throughout the *Republic*.

soul, it is distributed among the body's regions, the most troublesome soul-part residing in what is most bodily, the "women's quarters" below the diaphragm. On this layout the head looks like a portico into the body. And as the location of sense organs, especially (again) the eyes, the head also serves as the threshold that leads out toward the divine.[61]

When the *Phaedrus*'s great speech explains the workings of *erôs*, one part again functions to turn or steer the whole, although something other than the body's achievement of divinity seems to be at stake. The soul has a wing, Socrates says, and as he accounts for love's motivations he concentrates on that wing. You lose the wing when you fall to earth; *erôs* makes it begin to grow back; as it grows the soul lengthens and strengthens and grows itchy and moist. The sight of the one you love makes the wing grow but the loved one's absence leaves it aching dissatisfied. There is swelling, tickling, and irritation, there is a pounding like a pulse.[62]

The passage has an insistent explicitness to it. For that very reason it does not gain from being spoken of explicitly. Shall we call the imagery phallic?[63] But that leaves the question unaddressed why such presenting symptoms of bodily sexual desire should appear in the soul considered by itself. For the problem with reading the phallic quality of the soul is not that it is obvious but that its obviousness needs accounting for.

Nicole Loraux is right to say that "the body moves into the very substance of the soul" in this passage. But what does that observation tell us about souls? Is it that imagining a soul never ventures far beyond images of bodies, so that we project the outer into the inner? Fair enough – that point has often been made – but then the joke is on Plato for presuming to think he could think soul and body apart, to the point of promising their final separation. Immediately before depicting the soul's turgescence Socrates recalled its presomatic purity, before being "bound" in a body "the way an oyster is in its shell." Plato barely had time to write those words before betraying them with a fantasy of soul with everything about a body joined to it.[64]

61 Plato *Timaeus*: head most divine, 44d4; neck shields head, 69e1–2; desires in women's dwelling, 70a1; the special value of *ommata* "eyes," 46e5; *opsis*, 47a1, 46e5–47c3. Socrates follows Phaedrus's divine head, *Phaedrus* 234d6; "synecdoche for 'person,'" Yunis (2011, 105). Recall *Problems*, above, on sneezes' coming from the head which is the most divine part, 33.7. It is hard not to comment on the *Timaeus*'s putting male genitals in the part of the body known as women's quarters. As a first thought I will say that demarcating the divine within a bodily world takes place in this context as the distinction between male and female. The same double logic is at work, insisting on a boundary between realms and then incorporating part of one realm into another.

62 Plato *Phaedrus*: soul has wing, 246a6, 246c2; sheds it when leaving heaven, 246d3–5, 248b2, 248c7; soul warms and throbs as the wing grows back, 251b–d; swelling, 251b5; tickling and irritation, 251c4; *pêdôsa hoion ta spuzzonta*, leaping or beating as an artery's pulse does, 251d4.

63 Thus Belfiore (2012, 226): "Socrates' image of the wing recalls … the images of winged phalloi frequently presented in Greek art and graffiti."

64 Loraux (1995, 144). Plato *Phaedrus*: gods' souls and bodies, 246c7–d2; soul oyster-like in body-shell, 250c5.

Some commentators say more about the soul in love than that it reduplicates the body. Andrea Capra's parallel to "erotic mysticism from the Middle Ages" captures the passage's concern for the soul, and the sense that Plato wants to identify soul on its own terms. Giovanni Ferrari hits the nail on the head: "the body in question is a winged soul, and this enables Socrates to be at once physically graphic and allegorically coy."[65] What looks at first like the soul's phallic behavior depicts not the soul acting as bodies do but something more like a *cover* for the soul's action, covering something the soul is doing invisibly when it is moved by a desire whose visible expression we have seen in these graphic terms in the masculine body.

"What you call desire [Plato might say] from your animal perspective actually belongs to another order of things. I am showing it to you as if phallic so that you may recognize that we're talking about desire. The stiffening wing does not signify a penis any more than the word *erôs* does, although your hyper-somatized experience has led you to associate *erôs* with *phallus*."[66] The wing acts as you would expect a phallus to act, not by way of proving that even the soul is phallic, but because the soul's wing is what the phallus would like to be, or what it ought to wish that it could be. If psychoanalytically the phallus suggests flying because of an erection's apparent defiance of gravity, that still makes the penis more (in fact) a wing at heart than the wing at bottom is a penis.

You may walk away from the *Phaedrus* as from a failed attempt to discover the divinity that inheres in love. You should not labor under the misimpression that Plato makes love bawdy in the moment of trying to show what other-to-bawdy is in it.

In one passage Socrates discloses the difference between two ways of interpreting the wing. He has mentioned the wing before. He now justifies his attention to it. "The power of the wing is naturally to carry what is heavy upwards, flying up to where the gods reside"; and so the wing, "more than anything else of body," *kekoinônêke tou theiou* "takes part in what is divine"; it shares in, has something in common with, or has intercourse with what is divine.[67]

The soul's desire for the Forms, that same desire (triggered by beauty) that moves a beastlier person to copulate, does indeed reside in one part of the body as phallus-watchers believe. That part is to be marked off from the body at large as the eyes are in other contexts, or the divine head. The wing succeeds

65 Ferrari (1987, 154) and Capra (2014, 76).

66 Ferrari (1987, 266n22): "Notice that *kaulos*, the word used of the 'shoot' or 'stump' of the feather at 251b6, occurs in medical literature as a term for 'penis.'" I am grateful to Ferrari for drawing on medical language. His doing so helps to force the question I will be taking up of how to orient knowledge of the soul against knowledge of the body. But where he takes Plato to be revealing the penis despite himself, I understand the *kaulos* to be reminding the reader of what the penis reveals about the soul's motive part.

67 Plato *Phaedrus* 246d5–7.

at the task the phallus fails to accomplish, by elevating the soul when genitals draw it downward. The explicitness in its moist stiffening, far from demonstrating the limited quality of Plato's imagination (limited to the somatic), amounts to a plea to his readers to give up their belief that they know what bodily desire really is.

Nor do wings appear only on birds. In Plato's time an armored man wore a cuirass that covered his groin with flaps called *pteruges* "wings, winglets."[68] As winglets do on armor, the wing of the soul covers the groin's organ, somewhat as a euphemism covers an object's nature, if by euphemism you mean the propitious word. You might mistake the euphemism for what it covers, reading it (as Plato's readers do sometimes, despite him) as a name for what is worse, when it also means something better.

In the rapine tradition of Greek mythology that Socrates is seeking to put behind him, the penis could be worshipped as divine. On the basis of nothing that it had seen or adequately conceived, that tradition fantasized gods' bodies.[69] And where a god has a body, a god has a genital organ.

The new way to theorize *erôs* as divine requires a new way to theorize divinity. If the metaphysics of that divinity is pure separation from body, the epistemology of the separation, or the epistemology of return to divinity, calls for something about the body to represent departure from bodies into divinities.

## Socrates contra Aristophanes

The numerous topics this chapter has touched on so far, in recognition of the *Phaedrus*'s range of images and stratagems, all participate in the palinode's hope for good love. Call this divine *erôs* the counterweight to what Lysias and the first speech by Socrates understood as *erôs* the disease; or else set the *Phaedrus* alongside the *Symposium* and the speech in it by Aristophanes that shows in more universal terms what pathology *erôs* contains. Either way the *erôs* of the great speech offers an exception. The bodily world may contain abusive, brutal, short-sighted love; it also has room in it for the opposite kind.

Socrates and Phaedrus's talk of a divine body part, like their mentions of dedicated statuary, will not so much solve the problem as illustrate the challenge to exceptionalism that arises when the human body and its world

68 Xenophon: *On Horsemanship* 12.4; *Anabasis* 4.7.15. On armor and terminology, see Matthew (2012). In a curious near-parallel, we now locate the phallus behind the part of a trouser called the "fly." That name seems to derive from the flap of cloth across the trousers' front entrance, where it sits as a winglet might, a wing after all being something that flaps and flies.

69 On gods' bodies, and as it seems on mortals' inability to conceive them, see Plato *Phaedrus* 246c–d.

constitute the rule for which an exception is needed. The divine as Socrates reimagines it does not naturally roll around among bodies. If it did he could not display divine *erôs* as alternative to the bodily kind. He could not classify the *erôs* that Lysias criticized as only one side of the story.

Despite the value of divine *erôs* as a reply to the *Phaedrus*'s own other speeches, the palinode engages with topics in the speech of Aristophanes as it engages with nothing else. On both theories (as noted) *erôs* originates in the crisis of birth and aims at the lover's reintegration into a lost fellowship expressive of the lover's own original nature. Both (as noted) account for a kind of love that needs no training, given that after all one should not need fresh information about one's own nature.

As diagnoses of lovers' bodies the great speech by Socrates and the sympotic speech of Aristophanes both also associate the eroticized body with *topoi* or regions that indicate one's prior better existence. No other account in *Symposium* or *Phaedrus* has anything comparable. Aristophanes located his kind of love at the navel and uterus, places where a body had been joined to its mate. If one can infer the ancient separation from abdominal wrinkles and umbilicus, as locals show a visitor the boulder that Heracles set down at Gibraltar, then these scars before us where the gods did their work are epistemologically the closest point to where we had once been.

The Platonic body has lost its wing, and a (soul-)wing's regrowth shows that this *erôs* too seeks an earlier condition to be reattained. Likewise the eye capable of glimpsing the Forms' effects, though already in the body, tends back toward heaven or years to recover heavenly life. (In Plato's *Timaeus* the head being divine seems to work the same way.) Whatever it is about a body that marks the divine also yearns to recover heavenly life. And – as it did for Aristophanes – part of you comes closer to the previous condition you had been in than the rest of you does.

The corporeal version of separation in Aristophanes prevents the analogy from going further. On his story, the part that points beyond the individual body is the wounded part. But whether it is the eye that a philosopher identifies as divine, or a wing or the head, these parts bear no marks of trauma. No part shows where a bodily creature used to be heavenly. We approach the limits of what the demarcation of a body part might reveal. The injury of embodiment will not have left a scar on the body, because embodiment did not befall the body. The grand retelling of Aristophanes' myth as a divine adventure runs out of words.

Thus on the one hand the *Phaedrus* finds ways of declaring the body incomplete. Writing fails to aid memory (according to the judgment that Socrates attributes to Thamus) because it is made up of *exôthen hup'allotriôn tupôn* "foreign marks from elsewhere," inscriptions belonging to someone else, alien or even inimical to the body that reads them. (In Plato's *Protagoras* Socrates uses the same adjective *allotrios* for the words of a poet brought into philosophical conversation from outside.) By contrast a sound *logos* is "written in

the learner's soul." The soul writes on itself; it has a writing natural to it not corresponding to the body's.[70]

But even the Socrates who contrasts the body unfavorably with the soul lapses into assumptions of the body's integrity. When he tells Phaedrus that a speech needs organic unity he compares the composition to an animal "having a body of its own, so that it's neither headless nor footless but has midpoints and extremities fitting to one another and to the whole." Much has been written about how this criterion applies to the *Phaedrus* itself, or fails to.[71] That significant question aside, it is worth realizing what this analogy presumes about a living body: that its parts all work together to serve an animal's purpose. When Socrates uses the animal body to understand something else, he makes that body look complete and adequate.

## Hippocrates

Against the prospect of exceptional elements in the bodily world the *Phaedrus* identifies points of resistance. The tendency to rationalize myth is one. Another is suggested in an oblique exchange about Hippocratic medical theory – not because all medicine misconceives body and soul, but possibly because of an ambition in the Hippocratic writings to deny exceptional explanations.

Health and disease and medical science come in for frequent mentions in the *Phaedrus.* Lysias's speech and the first speech by Socrates both call the person in love sick, and it is in contrast to the diseased "left-hand" variety of madness that Socrates' great speech defines the good kind. Socrates and Phaedrus seem to be familiar with the physician Acumenus, whose son Eryximachus (also a physician) dines with them in Plato's *Symposium*; and there are other medical experts too, even though, when Socrates grades all souls depending on their experience of truth, doctors go into the unimpressive fourth rank out of nine and are confined to bodily treatments.[72]

Of the physicians named, the most surprising ought to be Hippocrates, for he is neither Athenian nor a known figure to Plato's Athens. (The

70 Plato: "foreign marks," *Phaedrus* 275a3–4; words of a poet, *Protagoras* 347e4–5; words written on soul, 276a4.

71 Plato *Phaedrus* 264c2–5. Discussions of this passage include Plass (1968), Heath (1989), and Moss (2012).

72 See Werner (2012, 167–168) for these examples. Plato *Phaedrus*: Lysias calls lover sick, 231d1; Phaedrus repeats that point, 236b1; Socrates in his first speech says the same, 238e4; later separates divine *mania* from the madness that is disease, 265a. Other mentions: Socrates calls himself sick with yearning for speeches, 228b6; says beloved is doctor for lover, 252a6–7; compares orator's effect on body to physician's prescription, 270b. Physicians: Acumenus, 227a5, 268a, 269a; Herodicus, 227d4. Physicians in the fourth rank, 248d5–6. Werner (2012) provides a compendious summation of the parallels to medical treatment. Derrida (1981) famously interrogates the *Phaedrus*'s depiction of philosophy as *pharmakon* "drug, poison." With all due respect to their readings, I find Socrates reacting to (some) medical science as a threat rather than as an image of his own inquiry.

"Hippocrates" whose name appears in Aristophanes is someone unrelated, and the lack of any need to disambiguate that name in the comedy suggests how few Athenians had heard of the physician.) In fact no extant Greek text refers to Hippocrates of Kos, aside from the medical works purporting to have been written by him, before the Platonic dialogues do, once just because Socrates is speaking to someone with the same name and once here in the *Phaedrus*.[73] So what Socrates has to say about the physician here is both exciting, as history's first assessment of Hippocratic theory, and for the same reason uncertain.

Seeking to explain rhetoric – the good kind – Socrates sketches its connections to cosmology and medical science. Pericles gets a compliment as a rhetorician educated by Anaxagoras; then Socrates moves in to explain how the knowledge in medical practice sets the standard for knowledge in philosophical rhetoric. In both cases the practitioner has to understand a "nature": the nature of body in medical science, of soul in rhetoric. Socrates takes the point further: "Do you suppose it is possible to grasp any worthy theory of the soul's nature without the nature of the whole?"[74]

Suddenly (it falls into their conversation leaden) Phaedrus seems to remember Hippocrates. When Socrates refers to "the nature of the whole" regarding soul, Phaedrus answers: "If we believe Hippocrates the Asclepiad, you can't even grasp the nature of the body without that method." Socrates agrees tentatively or politely, urging that instead of relying on the medical author's judgment they develop a sound account of the matter.[75] They will need to ascertain whether a thing is simple or complex, and how and under what conditions it acts or is acted upon.[76]

Since antiquity readers have proposed one Hippocratic treatise or other as the referent of this passage. Galen claims Plato to have had *On the Nature of Man* in mind. Commentators repeatedly revive the debate, which often turns on what Socrates means by his clarificatory remarks about things' acting and

73 Hippocrates: in Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazusae* 272–274 (Jouanna 1999, 7). *Thesmophoriazusae* was performed in 411, thus 3 or more decades before Plato's dialogues mention the physician's name. Note that Acumenus, Eryximachus, and Herodicus all appear at least by name in other dialogues: Acumenus (as father of Eryximachus) at *Protagoras* 315c and *Symposium* 176b; Eryximachus at *Protagoras* 315c and throughout the *Symposium*; Herodicus at *Republic* 3.406a–c. Other mention of Hippocrates in Plato: *Protagoras* 311b4–c2. Nails (2002, 169–170) argues that the interlocutor in the *Protagoras* is the same Hippocrates spoken of in Aristophanes.

74 Plato *Phaedrus*: Pericles most accomplished at rhetoric, 269e; aided by Anaxagoras, 270a; rhetoric and medical science, 270b; "do you suppose," 370c. The praise for Pericles here is a rare compliment. See Plato *Gorgias* 515d–516d; *Protagoras* 328e–329b.

75 Plato *Phaedrus* 270c–d. Yunis (2011, 212) calls the Socratic reply (*kalôs gar* "well said," 270c5) "lukewarm" and "mere politeness." Socrates gives the same kind of agreement to a claim Phaedrus attributes to Acumenus, 227b1.

76 Plato *Phaedrus* 270d.

being acted upon.[77] The size of the Hippocratic corpus gives its readers too many choices that might fit; on the other hand strong arguments tell against trusting any extant works as having definitely come from the Hippocratic school.[78] We can leave that discussion for another day and take up what most readers agree about: that Phaedrus puts Hippocrates forward as a theorist of "body"; that he responds to a very vague comment from Socrates about knowing "the whole"; that Socrates had not mentioned Hippocrates but rather cited Acumenus and Eryximachus as exemplars of medical expertise; that in response to the name "Hippocrates" Socrates hesitates to adopt the physician's analysis of "whole" but requires it to match what his own inquiry comes to. It seems that Hippocrates may be granted to know something about the body but not trusted to compare body and soul.

If for example "the whole" in Socrates' first and vague proposal refers to the whole constituted by body and soul together, a philosopher should not trust the bodily expert's pronouncements about what exists beyond body. Without knowing soul such an expert can't know the body–soul whole.[79]

And if we set aside the question of which work the passage alludes to, and also the question of which works were authentically Hippocratic, asking only what Plato might have read that he *believed* to be by Hippocrates, at least one example comes into view that the *Phaedrus* would feel compelled to distance itself from: *On the Sacred Disease (De Morbo Sacro)*.[80] Plato more probably read *On the Sacred Disease,* a discussion of epilepsy, than any other Hippocratic treatise, to judge by what he writes about epilepsy in the *Timaeus*; and the *Phaedrus* would have to have seen that treatise as a challenge.

To begin with we have the very name "sacred disease," which evidently functioned as an everyday name for epilepsy in classical Greece. Herodotus (writing before Plato) speaks of "the disease named 'sacred' by some" not as if skeptical but for the purpose of identifying it. Writing after Aristotle, Theophrastus uses the same phrase. But the Hippocratic author takes issue with the name. Epilepsy is no more sacred than any other condition; "all are divine [*theia*] and all are human." And Plato's *Timaeus* as if in response

77 Galen, commentary to *On the Nature of Man*, preamble; on the modern debate see Herter (1976); other recent attempts at a solution include Mansfeld (1980).

78 Ancient authors acknowledged difficulties in the texts passed down. Among skeptics in recent years the leading argument must be Lloyd (1975). Yunis (2011, 211–212) shares Lloyd's skepticism. Jouanna (1999) argues for more positive knowledge about the treatises, including dates of authorship for a number of them before 400; also see Smith (1979). Between these extremes one notable position appears in Mansfeld (1980), which – restricting itself to the passage in the *Phaedrus* – argues for a particular source that Plato is describing, but does not commit to large-scale acceptance of the works called Hippocratic.

79 Elizabeth Jelinek and I explore these interpretive questions in Jelinek and Pappas (forthcoming). In what follows I draw on the fruits of our arguments there.

80 Mansfeld (1980, 358n53) considers *On the Sacred Disease* as likely as *Airs Waters Places* to have come from the hand of Hippocrates. (*Airs Waters Places* is his own choice for works that the *Phaedrus* passage is referring to.) See Grensemann (1968, 7).

declares the disease to be "justly called sacred, being a disease of the sacred nature," which is to say of the human brain.[81]

Another disagreement covers such narrow ground that coincidental convergence would be incredible. Hippocrates diagnoses epilepsy as a condition of the brain and blames a preponderance of phlegm, specifically as opposed to bile. The *Timaeus* too locates the disease in the brain, but argues that it comes about when white phlegm mixes with bile, bile being the cause of swelling.[82]

When it pronounces all diseases equally *theia* or equally not, the Hippocratic work denies the foundational distinction in Socrates' speech. Given a bodily realm as understood in *On the Sacred Disease*, Socrates could not set one madness apart from others.[83] You may attribute all occurrences to the gods, illness and health alike; just as consistently you might (out of piety) deny divine causation in any disease; what the Hippocratic author does not countenance is a line within experience that separates one part of it as divine.

*On the Sacred Disease* offers a sharper contrast with the *Phaedrus* when it ascribes all reasoning to the brain. Thanks to the brain "we know what is ugly and beautiful, and bad and good," in other words perceiving what Socrates says that the soul takes in. And – *exactly* antipodal to the palinode of Socrates – the treatise says it is with the brain "that we go mad [*mainometha*] and suffer derangement [*paraphroneomen*]." Madness as such, evidently all of it, occurs in the brain. The author mocks religious healers who explain falling spells as the result of divine action (what Socrates might call "possession").[84]

Other connections between Hippocrates and the *Phaedrus* may sound more speculative. *Airs Waters Places* denies any divine visitation to blame when Scythian men become impotent and take to living as women. Again, no disease is more divine than any other. Those Scythians lost their erectile function from excessive horseback riding.[85] The corpus contains outright digs

81 "Sacred disease": Herodotus *Histories* 3.33.1, Theophrastus *History of Plants* 9.11.3. The phrase may have become a technical term (Jouanna 2012, 99). When Plato's Athenian Stranger refers to the "so-called sacred disease," therefore he too need not be expressing skepticism but merely pointing out the standard phrase: *Laws* 11.916a4. Against calling epilepsy sacred, Hippocrates *On the Sacred Disease* chapters 1, 2; "all are divine," chapter 18. On the refusal to call some conditions sacred see Jouanna (1999, 190–191).

82 Hippocrates *On the Sacred Disease*: in brain, chapter 3; caused by phlegm not bile, chapter 2. Plato *Timaeus*: epilepsy caused by phlegm mixing with bile, 85a–b; bile and swelling, 85b. There is an untranslatable play on words here and maybe an invisible argument against medical writers, because the swelling caused by bile is *phlegmainein*, whose name would suggest it to be caused by phlegm. Here too an objection to Hippocrates might lurk.

83 Note that Herodotus *Histories* 3.33.1 mentions epilepsy in connection with Cambyses, who *exemanê* "went mad, behaved madly." The root of this verb is the same as the root of *mania.*

84 See Hippocrates *On the Sacred Disease*, chapter 1, which describes faith healers attributing an epileptic seizure to Poseidon, the Great Mother, Hecate, etc. – a list of deities close to the one appearing in Euripides *Hippolytus* 141–146 that identifies those gods as causes of the *entheos* state; and Socrates speaks of the divinely possessed state as *entheos* at Plato *Phaedrus* 244b2–3, 255b6–7 (Jouanna 2012, 104).

85 Hippocrates *Airs Waters Places* Chapter 22.

at diviners, as when *On Regimen in Acute Diseases* scoffs that one diviner will call a bird seen on the left a good omen and the same bird seen on the right unlucky, while another diviner says just the opposite.[86] For that matter if another author's text provoked the complaint by Socrates that writing consists in "alien marks" (as if therefore untrustworthy because arising or existing outside the body), that text might have been the Hippocratic *On Head Wounds*, a plausible source for the *Timaeus* on the subject of the skull's bones, with a date of composition that makes it available to Plato.[87] In its opening survey this work distinguishes skulls according to their patterns of sutures. Some people's cranial sutures form a shape like the letter *tau* (T), some an *êta* (H), others *chi* (X).[88] Against this picture of natural (even specifically Greek) writing one might feel the need to insist that alphabetic marks are alien to the body.

Arcane possibilities aside, *On the Sacred Disease* suffices to cast Hippocrates in the role of a physician for whom medical science brings blinkered attention to the bodily. For this reason I do not share other interpreters' sense that the *Phaedrus* deploys medical imagery to portray philosophical rhetoric as metaphorical doctoring.[89] Medical science may be very well in its place, but it has a bad habit of showing that it does not know its place. Medical science can represent an insistent somaticism that threatens philosophy. Presumably doctors belong no higher than the fourth rank for just this reason.

In Plato's *Charmides* Socrates complains about the physicians of Greece (for all we know including Hippocratic physicians; he doesn't specify) that they pay insufficient attention *tou holou* "to the whole," where (in this context) that means body and soul together. What is good and bad begins in the soul "and flows from there out of the head to the eyes."[90] Medical practitioners have not earned the right to speak of "the whole" where they use the word to mean the whole of the bodily domain. And although it would be irresponsible to insist on this interpretation, the tepidity with which Socrates greets Phaedrus's mention of Hippocrates fits with this dialogue's push to conceive a body into which soul irrupts, even if only exceptionally.

86 Hippocrates *On Regimen in Acute Disease* Chapter 3. Jouanna (2012, 101) points to this passage as rare evidence for a preference for the left side in Greece. It is not however rare evidence regarding Hippocratic treatises' hostility toward priests and soothsayers.

87 Writing as alien marks, Plato *Phaedrus* 275a4. *On Head Wounds* is traditionally known by the title *De Capitis Vulneribus*, in English also as *Injuries to the Head.* Thickness and thinness of bones in the skull: Hippocrates *On Head Wounds* 1.5, 2.1, 2.3, 2.6; Plato *Timaeus* 75b–c. Date of composition around 400 (Hanson 1999, 52). Jouanna (1999, 66, 403) seconds Hanson's judgment, calling the treatise authentic and dating it to the late fifth or early fourth century.

88 Hippocrates *On Head Wounds* 1.1–1.4. I know of no medical authority that confirms this classification of skulls.

89 Werner (2012, 167) describes the importation of Hippocratic humor theory as that would work in rhetoric. But the balance between bile and phlegm is meant to replace the interaction between bodily and divine; this balancing act will not transfer to philosophy.

90 Plato *Charmides* 156e–157a.

## The divine on the right

The partitioning that sets head or wing aside as divine (and as unlike the rest of the body) contributes to the *Phaedrus'*s attempt to ennoble soul and elevate the domain that soul belongs to. A myth that moves beyond the mythology of rapist/abuser gods requires absolute difference between body and divinity, lest the "gods" we pray to revert to being these thuggish man-types that Socrates could not honor. And again it is Aristophanes who reminds us of the stakes in this enterprise. Take away a prenatal place of souls where one reunites with old companions, and rehabilitative *erôs* has no better object than the body it was born from.

Some images of the difference are stabler than others. A head really does differ from a belly. The wing may be stepping in to perform phallic tasks, but no one mistakes a wing for a phallus. In the *Phaedrus*'s foundational effort at distinguishing good from bad love, however – not in a myth but speaking as precisely as dialectic demands – Socrates equates philosophical clarification with "cutting at the joints"; a kind divides, as bodies do, into pairs of things with the same name (left and right shank, and so on); and in his own discussion, he says retrospectively, he had cut away the madness that goes *ep'aristera* "on the left" and divided that further till he found *skaion tina erôta* "a gauche kind of love." This analysis occurred in the first speech of Socrates, produced in substantial agreement with Lysias's speech. Then his next speech, the great speech or palinode, searched through the right-hand *mania* and discovered within it an *erôs* that went by the same name, which is to say "love," but was *theion.*[91]

Divine madness, and its special manifestation divine desirous love, display themselves as belonging on the right. Though of course not uniquely Greek the valuation is characteristic. (According to Cicero, favoring right over left distinguished Greeks from Romans.) The Pythagoreans opposed right to left as they opposed male to female and odd to even. Nevertheless we don't need to bring the Pythagoreans in to illuminate the language,[92] which owes more

91 Plato *Phaedrus*: cutting at joints, 265e1; left and right madness and love, 266a1–b1. The metaphor of cutting at the joints makes another appearance in Plato's *Statesman*, during a discussion of those *technai* that compete with the expertise of the legitimate king. "Let's distinguish them [*diairômetha*] into members [*kata melê*] as we would with an animal for sacrifice [*hiereion*]": *Statesman* 287c3. In this context, carving at joints is an alternative to dividing a genus in two, while in the *Phaedrus* the two acts of division appear identical.

92 Cicero *de Divinatione*: crow, thunder, lightning favorable on the left, 1.85, 1.106 (and see 1.120), 2.43; Greeks prefer right and Romans left, 2.82. For Pythagoreans on right over left see Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1.5, 986a24; *De Caelo* 2.2, 284b6, 285b23. But despite Aristotle's agreement (*Physics* 3.5, 205a12) he finds the Pythagoreans wrong to fixate on right and left to the exclusion of up over down, front over back: *De Caelo* 2.2, 285a10. Aristotle incorporates all three axes into his references to directions (*Parts of Animals* 3.3, 665a26), as does Plato (*Parmenides* 129c; *Republic* 10.614c). Plato also distances himself from the Pythagorean valuation when he favors ambidextrous training: *Laws* 7.794d–795d.

to Greek sacrificial practice,[93] and anyway recurs in this dialogue as it would likely not do as a reflexive carryover from Pythagoreanism.

Thanks to animal bodies' symmetry, the language of sacrifice immediately suggests homonymy as the Pythagorean valuation does not. When an officiant set the right thighbone apart it had to be distinguished especially from the left thighbone. Socrates uses the word *homônumos* "having the same name; homonymous" twice within a few sentences in comparisons between animals' limbs and kinds of *erôs* (and the kinds of madness of which those kinds of *erôs* are phenomena).[94] He has his eye on a mode of distinction in which the items distinguished are indiscernible, which is why they go by the same name. Madness divides into madness and madness. Where people once spoke loosely of love, *we* philosophizing *now* will speak with greater accuracy of both love and its homonym love.

The nearest Platonic parallels to such subdivisions appear in the *Statesman*. When the *Statesman*'s Stranger divides number into odd and even, the resulting species will resemble each other considerably, although no one would mistake odd numbers for even. In politics, the Stranger says, rule by the majority is called democracy in all cases; even so one must divide this form into the democracy that governs according to law and the one that governs lawlessly.[95] A bifurcatory division sometimes separates a kind even when no words exist for telling its subkinds apart.

In the *Phaedrus* the homonymy of subspecies calls for the words left and right, not as Pythagorean valuation but as the terminology suited to difficult differentiations, and therefore evoking the challenge that children face in telling their hands apart. Children don't go through a process of learning to tell up from down or forward from back, certainly not one they remember. But left things and right things are indistinguishable. For this reason Kant will call a right and left glove "incongruent counterparts," garments that define different spaces despite the identity of all internal relations within the objects. The point of Kant's argument is that things that differ only as right from left have no qualitative difference one can cite apart from their being left or right.[96]

In effect, Socrates separates holy from earthly by voicing the possibility that one can't tell the difference. The human eye's feelings might misperceive an airborne heavenly love as something pedestrian and bent on bodily seduction – might even be made to misperceive that way, as many human ears

93 Here and in Plato's *Statesman*, dialectical cutting at joints compares to what officiants do with sacrificial animals. See Gill (1974) and Forstenpointner (2003). A parallel is sometimes proposed between Greek animal sacrifice and the rituals described in Leviticus 8. See emphasis on the right hand at Leviticus 8.22–29, the right thighbone at 8.26.

94 Plato *Phaedrus* 266a1, a6.

95 Plato *Statesman*: number into odd and even, 262e; equal subdivisions, 262c–d; kinds of democracy, 292a, 302d. I am grateful to Burt Hopkins for discussing this turn of the dialectic.

96 Kant (1968 [1768]).

50 years ago heard "excuse me while I kiss the sky" (*erôs* heaven-bound) as "excuse me while I kiss this guy."

And the *Phaedrus* draws attention to the left–right difference. Very early in the conversation, Socrates tells Phaedrus that he sees the speech Lysias wrote hidden under Phaedrus's left arm. It may be obvious that an object being carried surreptitiously would go under the left arm of a man wearing a *himation*. But then Plato is still making Socrates state the obvious to prepare for the classification of ordinary love as the left-handed type, that type and the speeches about it evidently being all that Lysias understands.[97]

The distinction reaches up into the heavens. Aristotle says the Pythagoreans taught that the heavens have a left and right side; the *Phaedrus* assumes something similar. When Socrates describes the two horses that represent the soul's nonrational parts, as those parts are observable in heavenly life, he mainly gives them contrasting features with self-evident moral meanings. One horse stands up straight while the other is crooked, etc. Socrates also puts the noble horse *en têi kallioni stasei* "on the better side," which (as Paul Ryan's commentary observes) "probably means on the right, in the position of honor and responsibility." Certainly in a team of four the *dexioseiros* "right-attached" horse did the hard work. Even when separated from your body, it would seem, you can draw that same divide between the bodily and the heavenly.[98]

There is even an acknowledgment of lateral direction in the dialogue's mentions of Thebes, like the "Theban Simmias," Pindar's line putting his city first, or the great final topic, writing, its birthplace the Egyptian city Waset that the Greeks called "Egyptian Thebes."[99] Athenian tragedy designated Thebes the "anti-Athens," even an "anti-city" riven by faction in which power appeared as tyranny.[100] And in the following century, when Plato wrote the *Phaedrus*, Thebes had defeated Sparta to make itself the dominant Greek city. Perhaps only a decade before the writing of the *Phaedrus*, in fact, Thebes won the Battle of Leuctra against Sparta, and did so (it was said) by reversing the

97 Plato *Phaedrus* 228d5–6. A man wrapped his *himation* "cloak" around himself so that the left side was the place to conceal an object. But that sartorial fact only explains what side you would hide an object on, not why Socrates would refer to that side by name. Why not just have him say "You're hiding something"? The words draw attention to the side of the body holding the speech. Ryan (2012, 92) comments on the relevance of this image.

98 In heaven: Pythagoreans, Aristotle *De Caelo* 2.2, 284b6; two horses, Plato *Phaedrus* 253d–e; good horse on "better side," 253d4; "probably means on the right" (and explanation about the *dexioseiros* horse), Ryan (2012, 218–219).

99 Plato *Phaedrus*: Pindar, 227b9–10 (quote from *Isthmian Ode* 1.1); Simmias the Theban, 242b3; Egyptian Thebes, 274d3–4, 275c3–4. Waset called "Egyptian Thebes" by Greeks, Ryan (2012, 313). See Homer *Iliad* 9.381–383.

100 Vidal-Naquet (1990, 334–336) and Zeitlin (1990, 144). I would add to Vidal-Naquet's reading that the *Phaedrus* echoes *Oedipus at Colonus* in certain particulars: the sacred spot outside Athens' city walls, the preoccupation with fatherhood, and a divine guarantee for certain figures.

customary phalanx formation and massing its strongest fighters on the left instead of the right.[101]

## Right and left

These appearances of left and right are all nothing, in a way; nothing that needs explaining. But that is just what I find calling for inquiry, that left and right are the commonest most ordinary features of experience – which is to say, common for those creatures whose experience is somatic; ordinary for souls at home in their bodies and inhabiting the space through which those bodies navigate. The creatures that we have become since embodiment treat left and right as "second nature" in the exact sense of that phrase. We *once* had natures that did not orient themselves along these directions. Once translated into the embodied world we acquired this new nature. The soul in preexistence, and souls fresh from the Mysteries, have no idea how left and right would differ and no nose for the difference. One thought may come immediately after another, but it never shows up to the left of the other.

Even the head, that divine part of the body, can mix up lateral directions. Plato would have been able to know the Hippocratic *On Head Wounds*, which observes the effect of having a *helkos* "sore, ulcer" on one side of the head. A sore on the left goes with a *spasmos* "seizure" on the right, and vice versa. Can the divine head not tell its left from its right?[102] Or does this confusion attest to the head's difference from the fully embodied body that grasps the directions?

So this is the model for telling your mundane from your divine. As with the wing or eye or head, those features of embodiment by means of which animals imagine disembodied divinity, Plato is pressing for new indicators of the divine, as if inventing sign language to indicate a difference that myths in their degraded form fail at doing.

This mention of language brings me to the greatest difficulty with the directional way of locating the divine. If *telling the difference* between left and right in the sense of perceiving it is hard for a bodily neophyte, telling someone else what the difference is can hardly be imagined. The difficulty I have in mind is prefigured in Greek practice by a peculiar detail about left–right butchering for sacrifice. The share on the animal's right, such as its right thighbone, could be called *hosion* "holy, consecrated." (The word is familiar to Plato's readers from the *Euthyphro*, whose translators usually render it "pious.") The word *hosion* could also mean the contrary: what is undedicated and profane. "So,

101 The Battle of Leuctra was fought in 371. The most common date given for composition of the *Phaedrus* is the mid-360s (de Vries 1969, 7–11). On the battle, see Cawkwell (1972, 260–263). Theban strategy and the *euônumos* "left hand" side: Xenophon *Hellenica* 6.4.14, Plutarch *Life of Pelopidas* 23.1; also Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 15.55.2, where the reversed strategy is implied.

102 Hippocrates *On Head Wounds* 13.5.

for instance," one account of Greek ritual says, "*hê hosiê kre(a)ôn* meant the portion of a sacrificial victim that was regularly reserved for human consumption, the 'permitted' portion."[103] The side set apart becomes either clearly divine or clearly not, both times labeled with the same word.

The language of direction can be just as elusive. The Greeks had three principal words for "left."[104] When describing dialectical division in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates speaks of the love that is *skaios*, and the word sounds clunky. It is unaccustomed as a directional term, which is why I translated it "gauche," the closest in meaning of words for "left" that are used in English for purposes other than telling directions. In the prose and verse of Plato's time, and in generations before his, *skaios* had mainly metaphorical applications: crass, unlucky, clumsy, anything not sophisticated.[105] Despite its original literal reference to the spatial direction, in this passage the word provides a derivative judgment for worldly love, following some antecedent separation into left and right.

I pass over a word the *Phaedrus* does not use, *laios*, except to note that it doubles as the name of Oedipus's father the rapist Laius, and so brings the left hand together with Thebes, tyranny, and sexual deviancy all at once.[106] Two other words *euônumos* and *aristeros* are euphemisms, and used interchangeably by some classical authors.[107] Plato however almost never says *euônumos* in a directional sense, maybe because he uses that word in its literal sense "good name" or "good omen." In the dialectical division cited from the *Statesman*, when that dialogue distinguishes constitutional forms, the Eleatic Stranger calls aristocracy *euônumos*, that being the governance by few with the good name (as opposed to oligarchy). The interesting thing is that he means that as a favorable contrast with oligarchy, surely not because he would put it on the left in his dialectical differentiation.

We are barely better-off in dialectical practice with the word *aristeros*, the other word that appears in this passage, and elsewhere in the dialogue, and generally in Plato, as the term for "left." The adjective *aristeros*, another euphemism, appears to have been constructed out of *aristos* "best," the superlative of *agathos*, together with the comparative ending *–eros*, as if to say "best-er," really the best.

Used to denote the left, *aristeros* belongs among those euphemisms that do not merely play down the badness of a thing but insist on its goodness. And in light of the importance that the euphemistic *aristeros* possesses in this

103 Zaidman and Pantel (1992, 9).

104 Lloyd (1962).

105 Dover (1974, 122) and Halliwell (2012, 15–46). See Aristophanes *Wasps* 1013, *Frogs* 1036, *Wealth* 60; Demosthenes 6.19. In Herodotus *Histories* the word appears three times, always metaphorically: 1.129.3 (twice), 3.53.4.

106 For *laios* see Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* 714, Euripides *Heracles* 159. On Laius's associations with tyranny see Vernant (1982).

107 By my count Herodotus, to name only one, uses *euônumos* 6 times to mean "left," *aristeros* 16.

argument, it is remarkable that the *Phaedrus* (and not, to my knowledge, any other dialogue) draws attention to precisely this trick of language, "glossing something bad as if it were good." Phaedrus says that someone called Lysias a *logographos* "speechwriter," reporting the word as if it were an insult, and Socrates guides him to the thought that words can carry valences denying their apparent ones. Sailors on the Nile call one of its difficult turns the sweet bend in the river. You would not want to say "The deadly turn is coming" and then have the boat capsize, and hear the crew blame you for jinxing them. So you say "Here's the sweet bend ahead." And so the Greeks called a malicious spirit the *agathos daimôn* "good spirit" to propitiate it.[108] The Black Sea was originally known in Greek as Axeinos "inhospitable" then renamed Euxeinos "hospitable."[109]

Perhaps the nickname *phrunê* "toad," applied in antiquity to more than one beautiful courtesan, implies a reversed version of the same logic.[110]

The ambivalence of the word for "left" is present again, or almost present and threatening to emerge, when Socrates goes back to Egypt to ask what writing is and tells Phaedrus the memorable story of its invention. In attributing cultural innovations to Egypt Plato is drawing on Herodotus, who tells his reader how many marvels are to be found in that land. In fact Herodotus devotes a stretch of Book 2 of his *Histories* to cataloging the surprises that make Egypt Opposite Land. Greeks push the weft up when they weave but the Egyptians push it down, and so on.[111] As if by way of conclusion Herodotus describes how those people write, moving their hands from right to left. He adds, capping the exoticism of this land, that Egyptians do not consider their way to be reversed. "They say they move to the right and that Greeks go right to left." What Herodotus could be reporting with this sentence is hard to say.[112]

108 "Glossing something bad," Waterfield (2002, 96). See Yunis (2011, 171): "words should be understood in the sense opposite to their literal meaning." Plato *Phaedrus*: "speechwriter" an insult, 257c-d; "sweet bend," 257e1. Sometimes editors delete Socrates' explanation (and the idea of opposite meaning); thus de Vries (1969, 184–187). Yunis (2011, 171) defends its inclusion. The *agathos daimôn*: In Aristophanes that phrase might mean exactly the opposite at *Knights* 85 and *Wasps* 525 (Burkert 1985, 181).

109 Black Sea: Pindar *Nemean Ode* 4.49 uses the new name for the first known time; see *Pythian Ode* 4.204 for old name. The change in terminology is noted in Strabo *Geography* 7.3.6; Ovid *Tristia* 4.4. Even if the original name was a Greek distortion of a foreign word into *axeinos*, it is the change that counts, the Greeks' thinking the sea had been named inhospitable and rebaptizing it for good luck. On the similarity between "sweet bend" and "Black Sea" examples see Ryan (2012, 239).

110 Also spelled "Phryne" in English, this name was supposedly used in the famous case because of the woman's sallow complexion. But even pallor is at best an excuse for referring to someone beautiful by a word that implies striking ugliness. On this nickname for more than one courtesan, see Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 13 591c–e.

111 Egypt: origin of writing, Plato *Phaedrus* 274b11–275b2; Opposite Land, Herodotus *Histories* 2.35–2.37.

112 Herodotus *Histories* 2.36.4.

Given Herodotus's account of Egyptian writing, Socrates' references to that country and the first writing reemphasize the possibility that *aristeros* can carry opposite references, as you might expect from a word that points to the worse by meaning "really the best." If writing in Egypt calls to mind the reversal of lateral direction, and that reversal calls the possibility to mind that "right" could mean left and "left" right with nothing else altered in experience (this presumably what it would mean for Egyptians to call their writing left-to-right despite appearances), then there's no saying which side of an animal is the good side that denotes divinity.

The contrarian swerves of *aristeros* are even more visible when this apparent comparative to *aristos* operates in a division in which the *aristos* might appear on the other side. The superlative *aristos* is common in Plato, carrying a sense no more technical than "best" or "best at" does in English.[113] But on several occasions the *Phaedrus* makes *aristos* function as a quasi-technical term by using it to identify the preferred element in an opposition. Thus *aristos* alludes to the dialectical method when Socrates uses it for the best part of the soul, or calls *erôs* the best kind of inspiration.[114] Such uses of the word imply that carrying out a philosophical analysis will entail putting the best on one side and the other item on the side that is, you might say (in fact you *are* saying, like it or not) very much the best, *aristeros* – as if language were baffling the task of sorting out terms. This one is excellent and its opposite is more excellent, which is to say bad.

Here we might also reread a passage in which Socrates appears to etymologize *erastês* "lover" into the roots *erôs* and *aristos*. The *erastês*-lover is or experiences the *aristos*-best manifestation of *erôs*-love. But this is unbelievable even by the guessing-game standards of ancient etymologies. (And Platonic etymologies, even when offered seriously, need not imply true claims.[115]) The word for lover shares only the *–st-* consonant combination with *aristos*. The etymology invites readers to combine "love" and "best" in some other way; and when they do so the most natural merging of *aristos* and *erôs* is *aristeros*.[116]

No wonder we wander, as Socrates says, when we use words whose meanings remain disputed, like "just" and "good." No wonder a piece of writing rolls around, being understood in different ways and having to come back to its father seeking assistance.[117] Socrates based his own fundamental distinction on a word that won't remain still to perform a single defined task.

Incidentally the fathering metaphor – author as parent to authored work – a metaphor so familiar today that it is a cliché, has appeared several times in the *Phaedrus.* People father words; and the word for Plato's own father, which is

113 In one slightly unusual case at *Phaedrus* 248a1–2, the *arista theôi hepomenê kai eikasmenê* soul is (literally) the "best at following and resembling a god," thus the one most like the god.

114 Plato *Phaedrus*: *aristos* part of soul, 248b8; the best kind of inspiration, 249e2, 265b4–5.

115 Sedley (2018).

116 Plato *Phaedrus* 249e1–4.

117 Plato *Phaedrus*: we wander, 263a1–b5; writing rolls around, 275e.

to say his name, was Ariston. Plato has Socrates play on the meaning Ariston/*aristos* in the *Republic*; he would have observed the uses and inversions of *aristos*/*aristeros* more reflexively than we do. And as someone without human children Plato would have made his father's name Ariston the name of the child he did have, the philosophical dialogue, inscribed everywhere with what is best if also with what is still better.[118]

## Love and the limits of knowledge

When you use the world to map out the limits of the world and post signs of the otherworldly, such limits on knowledge as I have been describing are inclined to reassert themselves. We've seen the point before, that the world might never allow reference to anything besides itself.

Some read the *Phaedrus* as imparting this lesson consciously, Plato's intending a lesson about the limits on human knowledge. In that case a protestation of ignorance about the divine is all that we can hope for and all that Plato wants us to see. Some interpreters take the multiple and elaborate psychological taxonomies to indicate less the method for a philosophical rhetoric than the impossibility of any rhetoric that entails speaking to more than one person at a time. In the same spirit one might take the *Phaedrus* to imply that language as such is inadequate. One cannot fully know the soul; and the Forms that reveal themselves to the most eager disembodied souls, at least some of the time, especially lie behind what can be known or said.[119]

All sorts of limitations on knowledge may be implied, though speaking broadly I find many such claims about the Platonic dialogues to be overstated. In any case, the Forms and the disembodied soul occupy very different places from what I have been calling exceptional *erôs*. To appropriate the compelling features of Aristophanic love yet avoid the general diagnosis the etiology of such love leads to, Socrates needs examples of *erôs* that exist within human experience yet escape the general conditions affecting most *erôs* in experience. Declaring these exceptions unknowable does not bring philosophical humility. It leaves philosophy with nothing to do and no effect upon the world. The *Phaedrus* shows and even sermonizes about the threat of sexual abuse when love is not holy, or when love is only holy according to that regrettable

118 Plato and word-fathers, *Phaedrus*: Lysias father of speech, 257b2–3; "Phaedrus with fine-looking children," 261a3 (perhaps an allusion to Plato *Symposium* 177d at which Eryximachus calls him "father of the *logos*"; see Yunis 2011, 182); Theuth father of writing, 275a1–2. Maybe another Theban reference exists among these father-mentions, for after the great Theban general Epaminondas won his second major battle he lay dying from his wounds, and reassured a follower that he would not die childless but left two daughters, his victories at Leuctra and Mantinea: Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 15.87.6. On *aristos* and Plato's father Ariston, see *Republic* 9.580b7. Also see *Republic* 2.368a4 where Socrates says that the sons of Ariston belong to a *theion genos*.

119 On the impossibility of soul-knowledge in *Phaedrus*, see Werner (2012, 57–58). On language and Forms, see Sayre (1993), Morgan (2000, 183) and Werner (2012, 97–99, 107n18).

dispensation of divinity that honored Boreas. Lysias's speech assumed erotic abusiveness and the first speech by Socrates explained why it took place.

In this kind of world even knowledge may only increase the abuse. The expertise about souls that Socrates identifies as the purview of philosophy provides information for seducers to take advantage of, and obstacles to such knowledge matter to love mostly insofar as they interfere with the would-be lover's pursuit. Love in the right way and you'll inspire an answering love. Notice that the *objects* of seduction or abduction do not profit from distinguishing between demagogues and farmers. They get nothing out of telling Hermes-people from Demeter-people. They *would* benefit from knowing whether the pursuing lover is divinely touched or just one more of those predators the world is full of, who are full of worldly thoughts. To see it as Plato's intention that we find good and bad *erôs* indistinguishable is to turn the great speech into a capitulation to the diagnosis of love offered by Lysias and Aristophanes.

Socrates seems able to tell the difference. He feels the divinity at work in the spot they have come to. Everyone knows how attuned he was to the sign that would come to him, presumably sensing right away that it was divine. He never suggests that he could teach that perceptiveness to others.

Is this the problem of establishing a school for articulating what a charismatic perceives inarticulately? Then the *technê* that Socrates lacks is the challenge to Plato. Philosophy must not only represent the good *erôs* but also theorize the difference.

The *Phaedrus*'s speakers dwell on abuse when they describe a predatory lover who'd like to have a defenseless orphan in his sights; metaphorically when writing faces attack as it rolls around far from its father; and again in the comparison between a writing and a "garden of Adonis," which reinforces the link between the suffering misunderstood fatherless writing and a beautiful doomed boy. (That boy Adonis by the way was born of parent–child incest brought about by a god.)[120]

Socrates also mentions Ganymede. Explaining how the object of love comes to reciprocate love, he speaks of a flowing desire. When the lover approaches the one he loves and *haptestai* "touches, grasps, takes hold of" that loved one, "then the fountain of that flowing current comes over the lover, the one that Zeus named desire when he loved Ganymede." Here again love has a divine pedigree and guarantee. Socrates etymologizes *himeros* "desire, yearning" into the *merê* "pieces, particles" of desirous nature. He makes Zeus the coiner of that word, and Zeus serves a well-meaning *erôs* whose higher value the young beloved will learn to trust. The result is – it appears certainly designed to be – an alternative to the depraved old tales of dirty gods. So

120 Plato *Phaedrus*: predatory lover, 239e1–5; vulnerable writing, 275e1–4; Adonis 276b1–4. On Adonis and his birth because of an incestuous coupling instigated by god, see Ovid *Metamorphoses* 10.298–502.

Harvey Yunis writes of "Plato's seamless interweaving of traditional myth into his own new myth."[121]

But the traditional myth that Socrates interweaves into his analysis of desire began with an older lover's abducting a beautiful boy, then bribing the boy's father to tolerate the rape. The story went back to the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*; in Plato's lifetime Ganymede was still synonymous with anal intercourse, to judge from a joke in Aristophanes; and the Athenian Stranger speaking in Plato's *Laws* censures the story. It's very well to picture Zeus inventing a word for "desire" when he swooped down and *hêrpase* "snatched, overpowered, carried off" the nice-looking boy.[122] But the theory of love's particulate effluence does not stop this abduction from having been abusive. (Would we call it Plato's redeeming the story of Boreas if he'd had Socrates attribute the coinage of the word *himeros* to him?)

Even the heavenly parade of souls can be heard otherwise and linked to bad *erôs*. The soul rides its chariot following the god it resembles. When do people do such things? Socrates calls the group a "chorus,"[123] but these chariots don't suggest the performance of a tragedy.[124] Nor is it precisely a military image, when no Greek within living memory would have fought in a chariot. The awkward uses of chariots that we do find in the *Iliad* are solitary.[125] A pointed effort has gone into choosing the chariot as the way of thinking about the soul. The reason for that effort may be the attempt to capture motion as soul's essence, which Socrates' proof of immortality requires.[126] Nothing moved faster than a chariot did in ancient Greece – which is why athletic competitions included chariot races, the only events that did not pit one human body against another. But individualistic competitive racing, the commonest setting in which Plato's contemporaries saw a chariot, carries the wrong associations for the heavenly process.

Plato's commentators have identified a number of nonracing contexts that the charioteering soul might fit in.[127] The Homeric gods travel in

121 Plato *Phaedrus*: what Zeus called desire, 255c1–2; etymology of *himeros*, 251c5–6. "Plato's seamless interweaving" (Yunis 2011, 164).

122 Ganymede: story in *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 202–212; Zeus "snatched, overpowered" him, 203; intercourse, Aristophanes *Peace* 722–724 (where Ganymede is made the source of "ambrosia" for the play's monstrous dung beetle to eat; we have been told at line 11 that this beetle likes the "pounded" or "kneaded" dung of a man's loved one); see Bowie (1993, 136); censure of Ganymede story, Plato *Laws* 1.636c–d.

123 Plato *Phaedrus:* procession called *choros*, 247a7, 250b5; member is *choreutês* "chorus member, dancer," 252d2.

124 Nehamas and Woodruff (1995, 32n72) develop the image of gods' companies into a dance-and-drama organized as if in a theater. It is a compelling extrapolation from Plato's language, though I fail to see how swerving and leaping up the rows of a theater would be possible for horse-drawn chariots.

125 Chariot: regiment, Plato *Phaedrus* 246e4–247a7; used in choosing lover, 252c4–253c6; in *Iliad*, Cotterell (2004, 129).

126 Plato *Phaedrus*: immortality of soul, 245c–246a; soul self-moving, 245c5–d1.

127 Thus Slaveva-Griffin (2003) and Belfiore (2006). I particularly appreciate Slaveva-Griffin's emphasis on intertextual reading, even if I do not share her sense that the myth evokes Parmenides.

chariots, but not with humans – in fact, by way of differing from humans. Most Greek myths about humans who fly – Bellerophon, Icarus, Phaeton – turn out badly, usually ending in ignoble death. More to the point, those stories punish humans for flying, separating the human from the winged, where the *Phaedrus* reveals the wing in every human. In a closer association, Parmenides begins his revelatory philosophical poem with the seeker's chariot ride to the goddess who will tell him about being. And the *Phaedrus* myth's disclosure of truths that embodied humans cannot attain favors this allusion.[128]

Sad to say a more accurate parallel – human in chariot following god in chariot – makes the soul in heaven resemble a tyrant, if not to the philosopher already immersed in Parmenides then to the Greek, someone like Phaedrus for instance, whom the palinode seeks to charge with new philosophical ambitions, and for whom good and bad lovers must be set rigorously apart; thus too any pretender to philosophy from the true philosopher (whose difference from other people is more than anything else the topic of this book).[129] The image comes from the tyrannical dynasty in Athens that preceded the first establishment of democracy there. Pisistratus the founder of that dynasty, after his first exile from Athens, returned to power with a public-relations gimmick. A tall young woman dressed in armor as Athena and rode into town in a chariot, evidently with Pisistratus riding behind her (i.e., following his patron god). The story appeared earlier than Plato in Herodotus's *Histories* but also after him, in the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians*, in a manner that suggests it had become Athenian lore (as an allusion to the episode in Aristophanes implies).[130]

Stories of abusive or deviant sexuality attached themselves to the dynasty of Pisistratus, to be added to the legends of tyrants' incest. Right after this return to power, Herodotus says that Pisistratus's sexual relations with his

128 Homeric gods in chariots, Homer *Iliad* 5.364–369, 5.722, 13.23; flying heroes, Werner (2012, 131n10) (and see 131n11 on non-Greek antecedents); Parmenides B1 1–10, and Slaveva-Griffin (2003).

129 On the *Phaedrus*'s rhetoric transforming desires, see Yunis (2005, 2011, 126–127). On the true Platonic philosopher as opposed to impostors see above all *Republic* 6.495c–e; for the related inunction to philosophize truly, Plato *Sophist* 253e, and here in *Phaedrus* 249a.

130 Herodotus *Histories*: Pisistratus returning to power, 1.60; tall young woman Phua, 1.60.4. The anecdote does not specify where Pisistratus stood as "Athena" rode into town, but a herald was posted to announce that Athena *katagei* "is leading" Pisistratus into Athens, 1.60.5; this implies he rode behind. The story in "Aristotle" *Constitution of the Athenians* 14.4, an almost identical tale, specifies that the woman *paraibatousês* Pisistratus, using a specialized word for standing next to the driver. On the other hand, the Aristotelian version supports my reading in its closing words that "those in the city worshiped and marveled as they received him [*proskunountes edechonto thaumazontes*]," as the lover worships one he recognizes as having ridden with him. The allusion from Aristophanes appears at the end of *Birds*: Pisthetairos, whose name evokes Pisistratus, rides in a chariot with the goddess "Dominion," 1536–1546.

new wife were not according to *nomos* "law or custom."[131] Thucydides, who otherwise rarely mentions *erôs*, uses the word when spelling out a notorious tale from the same family's subsequent generation, when Hipparchus son of Pisistratus pursued young Harmodius as if he (Hipparchus) were the bad lover that Lysias warned of, the final outcome to his pursuit being the downfall of the tyranny.[132]

That Socrates' image for the divine source of love also represents its tyrannical manifestation forces the question of how the one being pursued (being persuaded) is supposed to detect the difference. The myth depends on what a chariot means but cannot admit everything meant by chariots. To speak of love is beginning to seem limited, not in some calmer sense in which not enough can be said about that great experience, but in the sense that just enough is said – one always ends up saying just enough – to describe both the yearned-for new love and the old variety from which a philosopher longs to flee.

### *Anterôs*

The account of *anterôs* "counter-love, love in return, an answering attraction"[133] ought to provide the assurance that the object of love will not be abused. As optimistic as theories of love get, this explanation of how overpowering desire makes you attractive to the desired one is morally reassuring too. You will not force the one you love into anything, even if the divine example that Socrates cites as he speaks is that of Zeus and Ganymede.

Socrates sketches the subjective experience that generates love's answering attraction. Your mind is so occupied by thoughts of the one you love that when this loved one is in your company an idealization of that person comes out of you. It is as if, broadly speaking, and also not speaking literally, the loved ones look into the lovers' eyes, see themselves reflected there, and mistake their own reflected charm for beauty flowing from those eyes. It is not quite the Form of beauty that shines out but something more like the lover's perception of that Form. "The stream of beauty [*to tou kallos rheuma*] goes back to the beautiful one thanks to whom there was beauty in the looking."[134] Less metaphorically Socrates would say that your desire makes you emulate

131 Herodotus *Histories:* relations between Pisistratus and daughter of Megacles *ou kata nomon* "not in the customary way," 1.61.1. This practice was serious enough for the young woman's mother to have questioned her at some length, and for her father to be angry when he learned about it, 1.61.2.

132 Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* 6.53.3–6.59.4. References to *erôs* in this section: 6.54.1, 6.54.3, 6.59.1; Vickers (1995).

133 Plato *Phaedrus* 255c1–e1.

134 Plato *Phaedrus* 255c5–6. I write this paragraph knowing how different the view of counter-love is in Halperin (1986). It is hard diverging from a work I have learned so much from. Yet I can't duplicate the grounds for hope that Halperin finds in the *Phaedrus*.

the finest version of the one you love, and this emulated idealization attracts the loved one.

The word *anterôs* hints at an ambiguity that might hobble this optimistic theory, or anyway disrupt the statement of it. As preposition or prefix the Greek *anti* can mean more things than "anti-" does in English. It can negate what it goes with as "anti-" does, but can also indicate a reply or reciprocation. When joined with *erôs* in this passage the prefix denotes a desire on the other side, so that love is not going unrequited. But elsewhere in the *Phaedrus* it joins with *erôs* to mean love's absence, when Socrates pictures the bad lover, now no longer in love, following "intelligence and temperance instead of love [*ant'erôtos*]."[135] The *ant'erôs* there says that love is dead. Almost as explicitly as it points to perversity in language with the sweet bend of the Nile, the *Phaedrus* reminds its reader that *anterôs* too might offer a case of the bad thing's good name.

The worry about counter-love does not rest on only a linguistic uncertainty. *Anterôs* as problematic effect is suggested by Socrates' etiological analogy: "Like someone who has been favored with conjunctivitis from someone else, [the loved one] can't give an explanation" of this responding feeling. The verb I translate "been favored with" is *apolauô* "to enjoy, profit from, have the benefit of." As an inverted "sweet bend" the verb was used ironically to describe the opposite of benefit, as Socrates must be using it in this analogy to *ophthalmia* "conjunctivitis." The Greeks seem to have believed that you could catch conjunctivitis by looking at an eye infected by it; hence the analogy to how love is answered; but hence too a regression to the sick love to which this one grand specimen was supposed to provide an exception.[136]

The ethical merit of counter-love also loses something when Socrates details the confusion of the loved one. "He loves [*erai*] but is confused [*aporei*] regarding whom he loves." The loved one *aporei*, in other words is in a state of *aporia*, which is the condition that the Platonic dialogues display as philosophical ignorance. Socrates says the loved one "neither knows what he is experiencing nor possesses the means to tell what it is [*oud'echei phrasai*]." (We saw such wordless lovers in the speech of Aristophanes, overcome by an *erôs* from which Socrates purports to save them.) This object of affection calls what he is feeling *philia* not even knowing what the feeling is. "It has escaped his notice," Socrates says, "that he is seeing himself as in a mirror." We might say he is loved and taken and kept in a state of ignorance.[137]

135 Plato *Phaedrus* 241a3–4.

136 Plato *Phaedrus* 255d3–4. Ironical uses of *apolauô* include Jocasta's remark that Creon "has enjoyed some ills" from her marriage to Oedipus, Euripides *Phoenissae* 1205. On catching conjunctivitis by looking see Porphyry *On Abstinence from Animal Food* 1.28.2; Yunis (2011, 164). What the Greeks called *ophthalmia* apparently was a serious enough illness to excuse one from military service, which therefore made it a handy excuse to invent for evading service: Aristophanes *Frogs* 192, Herodotus *Histories* 7.229.

137 Plato *Phaedrus*: he loves, 255d2; calls it *philia*, 255e1–2; seeing himself, 255d4–5.

When all goes well the lover sees in the loved one the ideal they both follow, and their shared confusion promises to lead to higher insight, as they both emulate idealizations of each other. But my question is how you ensure that all goes well, how you know at the time, and how you could say, that all is going well – and right now, how the object of love knows such a thing. One already has to be able to tell the difference between divine love and its rapacious tyrannical variety. And all the signs of one thus far have been signs of the other. From a distance, or after thousands of years, or from the perspective of the new mythologizing that lets human beings see what the gods are seeing, the difference will reveal itself. But in the midst of a desirous encounter one lacks a criterion for the difference.

Contrast this way to look at the lover with what is superficially the same image in *Alcibiades I*. That dialogue speaks of the eye's regarding itself in the pupil of another eye, an analogy to how a soul may contemplate itself as perceived in another soul. But in the account of love and self-knowledge articulated in the *Alcibiades I* you are aware of seeing yourself reflected.[138] The *Phaedrus*'s loved one is said *not* to realize that the image of love is a reflection. He sees himself without having noticed that he was looking into a mirror.

In Platonic terms, looking into a mirror means seeing something a step further removed from reality, so the *anterôs* will be weaker than the instigating *erôs*. This is why the mirror makes such a convenient allegory for grades of being. But as Plato's *Sophist*, *Theaetetus*, and *Timaeus* all say, looking into a mirror also means seeing an image that has been reversed left to right.[139] Does this matter to what the loved one sees? When you know that it is your reflection you see in the mirror, you remind yourself that what looks like a right hand is the left. But if you do not realize this is a reflection, you will take it to be a right hand. And the objects of love, looking into the hazy shine of their lovers' desire for them, don't realize they are seeing reflected images. Which is to say, in the language of this dialogue, that they will not be able to tell divine *erôs* from the left-handed kind.

My point is not a jape or a manufactured paradox. The one who is loved faces a difficulty that can be articulated without the language of smoke and mirrors. In the confusion of being idealized you see a version of yourself, but you see it under conditions that leave you not knowing whether you are seeing something mundane or holy, earthborn Typho or something simpler. (Does

138 Plato *Alcibiades I*: Socrates and Alcibiades on knowing the soul, 132c3–5; self-knowledge like eye's seeing itself, 132d3–5; organ of sight sees itself in mirror but also contains a mirror, 132e2–133a1; ones looking know they are seeing themselves, 133a. I am grateful to Nicholas Rynearson for returning me to this passage, and for many other insightful remarks about the *Phaedrus*.

139 Plato: replying love weaker, *Phaedrus* 255e; mirror images reversed, *Sophist* 266c3–4 ("opposite perception"), *Theaetetus* 193c7–d1 (reflection "changes right into left"), and especially *Timaeus* 46b4–c6 ("left appears as right").

the lover who projects this idealization seek to make you godlike or merely to flatter you into passivity?) What you can have seen of your lover's nature is anybody's guess. All we are ever trying to do is tell the difference. When the divine derives its name and appearance from something in the nondivine world, we are reminded how hard it is for that world to know the divine. Those who are divinely deranged might create poetry and speak of the future. Maybe they will chant prayers to purge a city of impurities. Maybe they'll love someone obsessively. People who are deranged in a humanly way do all the same things. The exceptions resemble the rule to a maddening degree. Will we ever have a reliable sign to tell us what goes on the left? Even the spirit-voice of Socrates is reliably protective only on the assumption that execution is not a bad outcome. Given a sure sign of divinity, love can return you to your origin without being deviant Aristophanic love. A reliable sign would require not merely the instinct possessed by someone who feels spirits guiding him, but something more appropriate to a philosophy that now dwells in institutions: a technology of the divine. No one yet has toppled over to the right into heaven, or flown up into it on wings, or seen it. To this degree we are all in Phaedrus's position, baffled about the object of our desire to know, and calling what we feel *philia*, sometimes *philosophia*, without understanding what that experience entails.

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# Part II

# How a city is made better

## The *polis* in Plato's *Republic*

Not for nothing (Plato would say) did legend and poetry associate tyrants with erotic deviance. That association rightly highlights the extreme place that tyrants occupy beyond lawful control. It only errs in equating what is pathological and hideous, whether in love or in politics, with what is aberrant and therefore scarce. For as a matter of fact the diseased quality of *erôs* prevails in what we are pleased to call the world – hence the need for a love conceived otherwise, as philosophical – and tyranny is likewise everywhere, or always ready everywhere to come into existence. Hence the need for a city conceived as philosophical.

To speak of "*a* philosophical city," a single such place, already suggests a rejoinder to the characterization of the *Republic* as utopian. No doubt this is an unavoidable discussion where the *Republic* is concerned. But calling a proposal utopian usually means contrasting it with the middling reality we occupy. Anti-utopians say, "Take the good with the bad," as if the proposal in question went to absurd lengths with its political improvements. But rather than transform civilization the *Republic* is asking what it would take to establish a lone just regime among political systems that otherwise verge on gross injustice. When states incline toward tyranny, the plan for one point of resistance against that inclination represents more a minimal proposal than overdone hope. The *Republic* seeks an exception to politics.

It is also telling that the exception will arise, if it does, within the Greek cultural landscape and embedded in Greek history. In Plato's world anything to be said about politics has to be said about a *polis* – that word meaning "city" but sometimes translated "city-state" because such entities governed themselves. A work that sets itself to propose a better version of civilized life will call for a better city. And the enterprise begins in midstream, in a civilization in motion. Plato lived long after any social order began, and long enough after the start of the social order he knew, that his time remembered its beginnings only in garbled memories.

As a result, very early in his examination of just lives and constitutions Plato's question for revolutionaries becomes: What is to be done *now,* done after everything? What is to be *re*-done?

## What others have said

The failings of known politics occupied writers before Plato. Maybe for this reason the *Republic* draws on other authors when diagnosing the sick *polis* and contemplating its recovery. The *Republic* does, and notoriously, keep throwing poets out of the city; it also finds ways of keeping them in, assuming the philosopher can coax statements out of them that engage in philosophical dialogue. Rewritten passages from Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, and Herodotus weave through the texture of the *Republic* in new settings for new purposes.

Whatever Plato's motive is, the *Republic* finds confirmation in other authors for the Platonic diagnosis of politics. As the erotic dialogues enlist Aristophanes and Lysias to help describe the ubiquity of bad *erôs*, Plato's preeminent political dialogue calls on voices from elsewhere to testify to the dangers posed by tyranny. Material from Aeschylus and Herodotus demonstrates how easily tyrants take power, by lawful means or not, either way undoing law and constitution.

Once the *Republic* establishes its new constitution, it makes room in the city for authors from the time before utopia. Homer – a Homer trimmed to fit – participates in the leaders' curriculum. Hesiod's chronicle of the ancient ages of humanity takes on a new form in the lie that the city teaches its people. As Plato sought a version of Greek religion, in the *Phaedrus*, that would let the gods account for love's divinity without rendering that divinity abusive and rapacious, so too in the *Republic* he selects fragments and images from among the poems central to that religion, recognizing the poems' power over human souls. The external voices can join in staving off the tyranny that they too warn against.

Whether speaking as if he and his interlocutors stood outside the new city contemplating its future establishment, or as if they were among the rulers in the established city practicing political rhetoric, Socrates incorporates outside material. So in one case we wonder what we can know and say in a compromised world about creating something better, in the other case and even assuming a promised land what it could know or say about its own creation.

## The questions of utopia

The *Phaedrus* opened itself up to the worry that what Socrates can say about good love will fall short of differentiating it from the ordinary and appalling kind. *Can divine erôs appear among humans?* – but also: *Will you be able to tell?* And Part II will supplement the question "Can the *Republic*'s city come into existence?" with a companion: "Will it look like a good city if it does?"

Moreover "looking like" needs specification. What will the city look like to people as already constituted and living in the present's cities; to the occupants

of the present world who are trained philosophers; to citizens within the new society?

Here the testimony of other authors has its further effect. The same voices from outside the *Republic* that assist it in identifying the problem of human governance will also tell against the resolution that the dialogue offers to that problem.

Plato's argument encounters a difficulty that roughly parallels one that arose in Part I. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates points out a linguistic effect in which a negative word is replaced by its opposite, and this contrariety tells against the dialectical project of identifying one *erôs* as good and the other bad. And in the *Republic* Plato dramatizes a hidden-message effect, famous from Herodotus and today named steganography, in which a speaker delivers a message without knowing it. Glaucon recounts a story to Socrates that surreptitiously shows how to reply to the story's moral. But (as the coming chapters will seek to illustrate) the steganographic effect deployed in this passage prods Plato's reader to ask what other imported material communicates despite his efforts, maybe without his noticing. Glaucon's story introduces the possibility that every quoted source will thereafter create in the *Republic*, that the voice being brought in and amended to suit philosophical purposes will say more than the one quoting it means to say.

Consider first whether the city will look good to those among whom it appears. Given similarities between the moment that creates the new order and the moment in which a tyrant seizes power, will the present occupants of cities comprehend the difference? Chapter 3 engages with this issue, drawing on material from Herodotus and Aeschylus, but also on ancient perceptions of tyranny. In archaic and classical Greece, for example, founders of new cities were characterized oppositely to tyrants, who took over a city that already existed. Socrates leads Glaucon and Adeimantus through the process of transforming a city, where the Athenian Stranger in Plato's *Laws* makes that work's conversation ask how to found a wholly new place. Why does Plato have Socrates play the role of tyrant when he had the admired role of founder also available?

Chapter 4 moves from the external perspective to the citizens' own idea of their city. Will they know where constitutions come from? Will they understand that they were created by someone? Transfigured to belong in the city the poems of Homer and Hesiod lose the capacity to register the new world's arrival. If this is what the future people know of poetry, they might never know that their city had a prehistory. The prospect of a beginning, at a time that Plato sees as the end of days, requires imagining not only a new era ahead but even one for which the old era (the time we're in) does not exist.

I do not read these moments as revealing that Plato orchestrates the *Republic*'s contributing voices in order to prove that the city will fail to come into existence. Proposing a better order strikes me as too insistently the *Republic*'s purpose, and Plato's intent in writing it, to make those recalcitrant story-fragments indicators of his secret true subversion. It makes better

sense to say that Plato works to reshape the literary tradition he knows into materials that support his argument, as if he could examine those plays and poems to bring conclusions from them that they had never meant to say.

Socrates had done as much. A rhetorical tradition, as probably reflected in the *Accusation of Socrates* by Polycrates, had condemned Socrates for perverse readings of Homer and other poets. Stephen Halliwell sums up the process elegantly when he says that Platonic philosophy "invokes, confronts, and absorbs poetic texts."[1] But the method has limits. As the creator-god in Plato's *Timaeus* has to work with a necessity not always open to persuasion by reason,[2] the Platonic creator-author makes the story of a beautiful city out of the wisdom he found around him, unable to control its conclusions.

Regarding the exceptional city's knowledge of itself the effect of these rereadings is more tentative than it was about the state's resemblance to tyranny. But we do bear in mind that the city comes into existence in a political world so tenuously just that even where tyranny does not exist it stands ready to take over. If only to guard itself against falling back into injustice – a decline that Socrates says the rulers will be warned against permitting[3] – the city should know how and why it began.

## The myth of Er

Utopian thinking of the past century sometimes appealed to a revolutionary vanguard in its plan to achieve a new society.[4] Without calling the *Republic* Leninist one might wonder whether anything in its proposals resembles Lenin's idea of the party. Seeing the new city, latent within the old world, before it comes to be takes extraordinary perception.

Chapter 5 poses this question about philosophical knowledge in reading the *Republic*'s most ambitious transformation of old material: the transformation it closes with, when Socrates tells a myth about the underworld and afterlife and birth into a new life. In some ways marked as a new version of the *Odyssey*'s descent to the underworld, the myth also pursues a goal negating that episode's purpose. Odysseus in the underworld sees characters from myth and legend for the last time, and he learns how to go home and cease being a mythic character himself. The heroic age has ended. Plato's story finds legendary figures in Hades too, even some of the same ones, but it comes

1 See scholiast's note BD on Aelius Aristides III.480; on Polycrates and what his lost *Accusation of Socrates* might have said (Murphy 2019, 79–80). Compare Socrates reading a poem by Simonides at Plato *Protagoras* 339e–348a. Platonic philosophy "invokes," etc. Halliwell (2000, 95).

2 Thus Plato *Timaeus* 56c.

3 After describing the noble lie, Socrates proposes that the rulers be told of an oracle that the city will be destroyed "when an iron or bronze guardian should guard it," Plato *Republic* 3.415c3–6.

4 Thus in *What is to be Done?* 1.4 Lenin calls for a party informed by Marxist theory to function as the front-line or vanguard.

upon them as they are preparing to return for another life. This underworld story ensures punishment and reward for those who die, but also envisions the heroes' return to a world that might or might not be able to identify them.

When refashioning Odysseus's trip to Hades the myth of Er problematizes a tagline from that episode "and then I saw." Odysseus uses those words to signal his encounters with the legendary dead. But Plato's myth contains incompatible types of vision at work in the underworld; seeing does not mean just one thing; indeed the two ways of seeing already crossed paths earlier in the *Republic* with reference to acceptance of the new political order. Sight can mean recognizing the new city's rightness but can also mean refusing to.

The issue that awaits after the end of the *Republic*, which will be the city's institution by the lucky empowerment of philosophers, thus comes to opposite resolutions. Will the heroes be coming? It depends on whether the right philosophers are already here looking for them. Their changing the world requires also reinterpreting it. But this final importation of Greek literature looking to an open future can't determine who will hear the *Republic*'s proposal, therefore whether that proposal will offer a marvelous future or only more years ahead of nonphilosophers' laughing at philosophers' hopes for the *polis*.

## The fulcrum of this book

I hope that my reading shows how the perennial question of the city's possibility, that question both part of the *Republic*'s philosophizing and an addendum to philosophizing, leads to the even older question: Does the philosopher who looks forward to the city's foundation know something that no one else does? And so the chapters on Plato's *Republic* occupy the center of this book where a fulcrum would go. The *Republic*'s politics bring to the fore the philosopher who was implied to be, though not described at length as being, the condition for the possibility of morally acceptable *erôs*; thus Part II looks ahead to the topic that Part III devotes itself to: Who *is* this philosopher? Not quite one human being among others – but also therefore an exception?

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# 3 Speaking of tyrants

## Gyges and the *Republic*'s city

Political exceptionalism comes into the *Republic* to offer relief from the depressing condition that human societies find themselves in. Whoever controls the power in a *polis* presents their personal advantage as the way things ought to be. They give their self-serving arrangement the respectable name of justice.

A universal imposition of power along such cynical lines presupposes that human beings seek their own advantage. It also presumes what no one wants to challenge, that they will live in a society complex enough to contain centers of real power. A sleepy little farm village would not have such offices in it, and its self-aggrandizing occupants could not steer its public or its moral culture very far in one direction or the other.[1] But if you do not escape the cynical exercise of power by that route, the opportunity for personal power seems to be a given: political offices, legislative and judicial institutions, armed forces. Then the human propensity to seek selfish gain, if it really does drive everyone, makes government deadly dangerous.

The *Republic* begins with a wide-ranging conversation whose participants press versions of a cynical reading of justice (and a gloomy view of human motivations). Cephalus already sounded pettily self-concerned when he admitted to planning for good treatment by the gods after his death. His son Polemarchus brings in the testimony of the poet Simonides: Justice means helping friends and hurting enemies. Thrasymachus then presents his ambitious cynicism according to which justice has no intrinsic meaning but rather reflects the power dynamics within organized society.[2]

When Thrasymachus mentions the constitutional forms that permit different exercises of power and conceptions of justice,[3] he brings the tyrant

1 Socrates begins his political argument, in Book 2, with a simple bucolic community along these lines, but abandons the approach when Glaucon calls it a city of pigs: 2.370c–372d. On whether this is the true utopia in the *Republic* see McKeen (2004) and Morrison (2007, 250–252); on the *Republic*'s utopia Burnyeat (1999).

2 Plato *Republic* Book 1: Cephalus plans for death, 330d–331a; helping friends, etc., 332a–b; justice has no meaning, 338c–339a.

3 Plato *Republic* 1.338d.

into the *Republic*'s argument. By putting everyone else in the position of serving the tyrant's purposes even when being just, Thrasymachus makes clear what the worst human condition must be. "Justice" under tyranny amounts to being robbed and exploited.

But Polemarchus quoting Simonides had already turned the examination of virtue toward cynical interpretations of the virtues too; and before him Cephalus had quoted Sophocles on aging, when he fled sexual desire as a slave would flee a tough *despotês* "master," in effect a tyrant.[4] Reading even only as far as the speeches of Cephalus we get an idea of the aggressive drives that motivate human beings.

In a number of respects Book 1 stands apart from the remainder of the *Republic.* Different characters speak and Socrates treats them differently, and Plato's readers have sometimes argued that he wrote Book 1 long before the rest, in the style of his shorter dialogues. I will not discuss that hypothesis except to say that *if* it means Plato fails to integrate Book 1 into the rest of the *Republic* then the hypothesis is false.[5] The nine books that follow steadily and thoroughly pick up the claims in Book 1 and reexamine them.

In particular there is Book 2, which begins with Plato's brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus continuing Thrasymachus's challenge to virtue, Glaucon for his part using a figure from Herodotus to make the threat of tyranny vivid. The existence of a single tyrant suffices to show, in Thrasymachus's hands, how moral language might refer to nothing above and beyond power arrangements. But the challenges in Book 2 include a proposal from Glaucon that tyranny is not the spectacular rare specimen but the standing possibility in society, even the default condition for human beings.

## Gyges

Glaucon makes his point with a story about Gyges tyrant of Lydia.[6] Before the rise of Persia, Lydia dominated Asia Minor, and in the old days Gyges governed this wealthy country whose final ruler would be his descendant Croesus.[7] The word *turannos* "tyrant," not a Greek word and specifically not

4 Plato *Republic* 1.329b–d.

5 For strong considerations against the hypothesis, see Kahn (1993).

6 Glaucon literally speaks of an "ancestor of Gyges": Plato *Republic* 2.359d1. The sentence can't be read any other way; yet I believe it to be an error in the manuscript tradition. (1) The Greeks were very interested in how tyranny began, with Gyges as their earliest example of the phenomenon. Even though Glaucon's story implies that tyranny has always existed, the story loses its punch if it purports to be about someone else. (2) Later in the *Republic*, circling back to the argument they started with, Socrates concludes that one should be just even if one possesses the ring of Gyges: 10.612b. He does not speak of the ring of Gyges' ancestor. Those who nevertheless insist that the story is about his ancestor may replace everything I say about Gyges with "ancestor of Gyges." The conclusions about souls and tyranny remain the same.

7 Plato's Gyges story does not mention Croesus, but he was widely known to be the final king of Lydia whom Cyrus of Persia conquered: Herodotus *Histories* 1.26.1 ff.; Bacchylides *Epinician* 3.25–30; Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* 1.16; Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 1.5. For

found in Homer, enters the literary record in Archilochus in association with Gyges and his fortune.

The reference to Gyges *turannos* may well be the first appearance of the word in Greek poetry – not only its first surviving appearance – which would explain Herodotus's special mention of Archilochus. That poem was evidently the oldest mention available to the Hellenistic scholars who had far more ancient writings available to them. They recognized *turannos* to be a non-Greek word and looked for the earliest use of it that *they* were able to find; the text by Archilochus survives because those scholars judged it historically significant. So Gyges is the first person that the Greeks used their new word "tyrant" to identify.[8]

The evidence indicates that the Greeks took special interest in the question of how Gyges, of all tyrants, rose to power. Plutarch and Nicolaus of Damascus, both writing centuries after Plato, tell versions of the story.[9] Archilochus himself, writing in the seventh century (200 years before Herodotus), may have presented his own version.[10] In 1950 a papyrus fragment was published containing part of a tragedy about Gyges,[11] although it might derive from the earliest complete version of the story that we have, earlier than Plato's, namely the version with which Herodotus begins his *Histories*.

All the stories have a legendary quality, as you'd expect from a tradition that sought to understand how someone should have suddenly come into as much power and wealth as Gyges did. "What Gyges with all the gold does is no concern of mine … nor do I desire [*ereô*; feel *erôs* for] tyranny," Archilochus writes in that first appearance of the word. As Victor Parker observes, Archilochus speaks this way to distinguish himself from everyone else, because everyone else *did* want what Gyges had. Gyges must have had plenty. So everyone would want to know: How did he get it?[12]

Plato's awareness of Croesus, see *Republic* 8.566c, which cites an oracle quoted in Herodotus *Histories* 1.55; also Plato *Letter* 2.311a.

8 On Archilochus's reference to Gyges see Herodotus *Histories* 1.12.2. Archilochus first to use *turannos*: Hippias fragment 6 (FGrHist 6 F 6), Węcowski (2016). The *argumentum* to *Oedipus Rex* says: "Hippias of Elis says: 'Archilochus was the first to use the word *turannos*.'" The Christian author Clement of Alexandria, maybe drawing on the same sources, says Gyges was "first to be called tyrant [*turannon*]": *Stromata* 1.117 (Parker 1998).

9 Plutarch *Questiones Graecae* 45. On the tradition see Smith (1902a, 1902b). Nicolaus of Damascus lived in the early years of the Roman Empire, but his version is known through a synopsis by the tenth-century Constantinus Porphyrogennetos. The Gyges in that version, whose story may derive from a Lydian source, falls in love with the queen and tries to seduce her but is rebuffed; then with another woman's help he assassinates the king. Meanwhile Plutarch, in a very short account, places emphasis on an ax first won by Heracles and subsequently a source of legitimacy for Lydian kings, which Candaules gave carelessly to his *hetairos* "guard, cavalryman" Gyges.

10 Clay (1986).

11 On the date and provenance of the *Gyges Tragedy* see Kotlińska-Toma (2015, 183–184).

12 "Nor do I desire tyranny," Archilochus fragment 19 = Plutarch, *On the Tranquility of the Soul* 10; Parker (1998, 151).

The *Republic* contains what is now the best-known version of the story, although by appealing to the Gyges tradition it also opens the gates to let the story's other variations come into this all-night conversation that Glaucon and Adeimantus are goading Socrates into. We may not always say more than we intend to, but drawing on other people's stories increases the odds that our words will mean more than we mean by them. And other people's stories about Gyges keep the thought before us that tyranny happens, by a fluke and just like *that*, even when something else was supposed to happen.

Glaucon turns to the Gyges story to illustrate his suspicion that only social oversight keeps people in check. Socrates may fancy justice to be valued both for itself and for social consequences, but in fact no one would act rightly if not for the social consequences.[13]

Imagine how you'd behave if you could escape detection, as they say that Gyges did. He started out as a Lydian shepherd, Glaucon says, but one day an earthquake opened up a chasm in the earth, and Gyges entered the chasm to find, among other marvels, a bronze horse. Inside the horse he saw an oversized naked male corpse, and on the corpse's finger a ring with a seal. Gyges took the ring and soon discovered that if he turned it on his finger to put the collect or seal on the palm side of his hand, he became invisible. He arranged to go deliver the shepherds' report to the king, whereupon he used his invisibility to seduce the queen, kill the king, and make himself tyrant. And so as it seems (as one expects; as Glaucon fears) would everyone else.[14]

Tyranny does not quite enter the story by accident, but it does lie outside what Glaucon treats as the true point. Glaucon knows that everyone who hears about the power to become invisible will imagine what they'd do with a ring like that. Some combination of sex, wealth, and power would enter into most people's fantasies; so why not make the example vivid, and the imaginary ring's value the greatest imaginable, by letting it make possible the wealth of Lydia and the power of tyranny? The story shows that everyone has the mind of a tyrant, lacking only the capacity to act as tyrants do.

Socrates not Glaucon draws the discussion of justice away from the individual human virtue that the brothers had been asking about.[15] The *Republic* formally unites the worry about moral psychology with political theory in the landmark proposal from Socrates that a city is a soul "writ large." Tyranny emerges at the end of that political argument as the worst-case city and exemplar of injustice, and the tyrant within such a constitution as the pathological, delusional, most miserable of all human beings.[16] Here in the opening of the *Republic*'s argument Glaucon keeps his focus on the individual person and the

13 For a discussion of the Gyges story, and of how it makes that argument, see Shields (2006). I take everything in my treatment to agree with or assume Shields's reading.

14 Plato *Republic* 2.359c–360c.

15 Adeimantus seems to speak for both brothers when he asks Socrates to reveal the power that justice and injustice both have "in the soul": Plato *Republic* 2.366e5–6.

16 Plato *Republic*: large and small letters, 2.368c–e; tyrant most miserable, 9.587b–588a.

justice that resides in the person's soul, even *as opposed to* what justice means politically; but like it or not he tells a story suited to the *Republic*'s emerging political agenda. It is as if he brings political theory into the *Republic* even in the act of denying politics.

You may want to ask about a social virtue as a power in the soul and independently of that virtue's political manifestations. Nevertheless a sustained look at the individual soul turns out to implicate tyranny, if only as the object of a soul's subterranean desire. And conversely, the knowledge to be had about tyranny is knowledge about the soul.

Today a word in computer forensics, "steganography," describes the effect that Glaucon's speech has in spite of his intentions. If cryptography entails encoding a message to keep it secret, so that outsiders to the communication see an unreadable message, steganography sends a message where there had seemed to be no communication at all. Fans of the film *Charade* may think of the uninformative note inside a stamped envelope, the purpose of which turns out to have nothing to do with what's written in the note. But everyone's favorite examples of steganography come from Herodotus. A slave appears, message tattooed on his scalp and his hair grown back, so that the communiqué appears when his head is shaved. Another courier brings a blank wax tablet, ostensibly no message at all until a clever girl thinks to scrape the wax away and find words written on the wood beneath.[17]

Glaucon reenacts Herodotean steganography when he brings a subject to Socrates without knowing it. Even pressing to enter the *Republic*'s argument he resembles a character from the *Histories*. He will do well to remember those messengers. The philosophical appropriation of voices from outside should mind the provenance of its imported images, lest even the philosophicalized poem or history introduce unnoticed elements into the dialogue.

We do not have to call the phenomenon steganography to find it worth studying. The *Republic* is full of quoted material that worries the question where forms of government come from, especially tyranny. As the dialogue investigates how to institute a militarized state, this quoted material threatens to make the object of their conversation a tyranny.

## Gyges in Herodotus

If Gyges appears in *Republic* Book 2 to start the philosophical argument, the non-Greek of the same name appears early in Herodotus to begin a

17 *Charade*: Stanley Donen (1963). The stamps on the envelope turn out to be fantastically valuable even though the note inside is trivial. Herodotus *Histories*: message on scalp, 5.35.3; under wax in tablet, 7.239.3-4. In December 2016, the top two non-Wikipedia hits in my search for "steganography" were Kessler (2001, 2004). The Wikipedia entry for steganography gives the episodes from Herodotus as its first examples. One by Kessler cites the tattooed scalp, the other both the scalp and the wax tablet. Neither article names Herodotus as a source. As folk tales the stories make steganography a general phenomenon rather than a feature of Herodotean history-writing.

historical account. Herodotus says it will be a historical account like no other. Great wars have taken place between Greeks and Asians, and they've always been blamed on kidnaped or runaway women. Indeed the question has often been no better than the query which one the woman was, victim of a kidnaping or treacherous willing departure. There was Io, Medea in the opposite direction, then again Helen taken from Menelaus and inspiring the Trojan War.[18]

Herodotus wants to offer a new kind of explanation for the Persian War, the great war of his own father's era, and show where the first injustice came from that led to that war. He replaces the old stories and predictable debates with a story that has not been heard. The "first of the unjust deeds [*adikôn ergôn*]" by an Asian against the Greeks was the work of Croesus, last ruler of Lydia[19]; and Croesus was cursed to be the final member of a legacy founded by Gyges when he usurped the throne. So the history that begins with a first injustice traces that injustice to the cause of the curse, Gyges' accession to power. Because he is the earliest of the tyrants whose story Herodotus tells, and because the Greeks saw Gyges as the first one they called a tyrant, the story of his coming to power is the closest thing to a story about how tyranny began.

As far as Greek historians are concerned, then, history begins with Gyges. Prehistory ends with his predecessor Candaules, the 22nd member of his family to govern Lydia. Herodotus says that dynasty held power for 505 years.[20] Then one day Candaules felt *erôs* toward his wife. Herodotus knows that *erôs* and marriage combined normally signal the end of a story not the beginning. But he has a story that can replace the narrative cliché of the lost wife, and he knows how motivations transform themselves. If Candaules had not been married to this woman, his *erôs* would have led him to pursue her. Here they were married and he still wanted more. So he told his trusted bodyguard Gyges how beautiful she was, so that Gyges might desire her too.

Honest Gyges was willing to take the king's word for it. But Candaules didn't want to rely on words and trust.[21] Testimony is easy to disbelieve; eyes don't lie. He persuaded Gyges to hide in the royal bedchamber and watch the queen undress for bed. The queen saw Gyges watching her and forced him to help her avenge the humiliation. They killed the king and Gyges took the

18 Herodotus *Histories* 1.2–1.3.

19 Herodotus attributes the "first of unjust deeds" to Croesus: *Histories* 1.5.3.

20 Herodotus *Histories* 1.7.4. Because Gyges is thought to have taken the throne in 685, Herodotus's numbers place the beginning of the preceding dynasty in 1190, which coincides with the collapse of the Hittite state that did in fact precede the Lydians. This is one of the occasions on which Herodotus's numbers agree closely with modern numbers.

21 On tyrants and trust see Plato *Republic* 8.566d–e: At first, the tyrant smiles at everyone and denies he is a tyrant and makes empty promises to everyone.

throne, and as far as Herodotus is concerned, the rest was history.[22] To be precise, history was the rest of what happened.

Gabriel Danzig's analysis brings forward the exculpatory function of the story, which shows all the signs of having been concocted by Gyges to cover over a romance between bodyguard and queen, and the king found murdered in his bed. (The queen summoned Gyges after the night that he saw her, and he reported to her as "he customarily did whenever the queen called." Why all this explaining? Because a king's man would not have known the way to his queen's private chambers.[23])

Danzig's contrast between the exculpatory extreme of one story and the *Republic*'s story's inculpatory insistence points toward the question about degrees of wrongdoing that all the versions of this story address. On one account the illicit relationship between Gyges and the queen is no better than rumor; in another fact; in another story he saw her naked, but not because he wanted to. The stories also vary which office Gyges held, for in all of them he somehow works for the king, being part of the political order that he will not eradicate but insert himself into. Glaucon says he is a shepherd and goes to the palace to report on the herds. Herodotus says *aichmophoros* "spear-carrier," where that means "bodyguard." Plutarch writing during the Roman Empire anachronistically makes Gyges a *hetairos* to the king, using a word for a king's guardsman or cavalryman that would have been used in Alexander's Macedonia.[24]

As the office varies, so does the political upheaval or the degree of wrong done to the social order, when Gyges takes the throne. He belongs to the right class for Plutarch; at least belongs in the palace for Herodotus; but aristocratic Glaucon makes his ascent a world gone wrong and reversal of fortunes, a *shepherd* of all people ensconced on the throne![25]

So the story is asking: What is the magnitude of the trauma represented by the tyrant's ascent to power? How criminally did Gyges behave, and how far did he upset the old order?

22 Herodotus *Histories* 1.8–1.12. Someone focused on the *persona* of Herodotus within his own *Histories* might think of his frequent insistence on seeing for oneself. From the historian's perspective Candaules is right; therefore Gyges is the first historian–observer, present at the beginning of history and powerful in shaping it.

23 Danzig (2008). Gyges reported to queen, Herodotus *Histories* 1.11.1.

24 Arrian *Anabasis of Alexander* 3.16.11 speaks of Alexander's placing Macedonian horsemen among his *hetairikên* "companion cavalry."

25 Danzig (2008) rightly emphasizes this last point. That Gyges tended sheep raises questions about power. No doubt the occupation was a lowly one; but recall that in Book 1, Socrates and Thrasymachus had disagreed over whether shepherding seeks the good of the sheep, with Thrasymachus insisting that shepherds exploit the sheep for the shepherds' own good: *Republic* 1.343a–b, 1.345c–d. The Biblical metaphor of lord as herder does not occur commonly in Greek writings. Besides Book 1 however there is Plato *Statesman* 261d–e. Shepherding's ambiguity leaves two options open. Does Gyges act like a tyrant despite the lowness of his occupation, which implies that tyranny arises in every soul; or because of his occupation's tyrannical work?

In one respect Herodotus's answer coheres with the exculpatory effect of his Gyges story. As offensive as the proposal is that Gyges look the king's wife up and down, to Herodotus it might not have even counted as wrongdoing. Husband to the woman he considers the world's most beautiful, Candaules is living the dream that Paris asked for when he awarded Aphrodite the golden apple. Candaules loves a real-life Helen and she lives in his palace. Paris misjudged and acted badly by undervaluing *xenia*, the ethos of hospitality that Homeric Greeks treat as one of the world's few moral absolutes: Menelaus welcomed Paris as a guest, and Paris responded by destroying the man's marriage. Candaules surely misjudged when he hid Gyges in his bedroom, but if *xenia* is the standard against which to judge him then he erred by practicing its excess rather than its deficiency, exaggerating hospitality into folly.

Not only *xenia* is at stake. Candaules has a claim to communicate. Messages go wrong and testimony may be doubted, so he tries the most direct communication he can – displaying his wife – and imagine what happens next. *That* message goes wrong too. As Herodotus observes, the display of a naked body carries a meaning of shame in human culture, and especially among non-Greeks,[26] quite distinct from the meaning "How happy is Candaules!" that the king had hoped to give the sight of his wife. Misunderstanding follows, and an indignant wife's response.

Up to the moment that they kill Candaules, it looks as if the political form that would become the subject of tragedy happened in the first place as a farce. (For if the great tragedies occur within families, as Aristotle will say,[27] it is also true that farces take place there too.) From Candaules' error comes tyranny. To be sure, for Herodotus the word "tyrant" does not carry the charge it will for later authors. When the rule by one is spoken of negatively the *Histories* tends to use only *turannos*, not also *monarchos* or *basileus* "king." But in general Herodotus substitutes "tyrant" for "king" without self-consciousness.[28]

And yet Herodotus begins with the story of Candaules. This is not because any place is as good as any other to begin, as some of Plato's dialogues suggest about philosophy. Socrates runs into an acquaintance who chances to use the word "bravery" but can't explain it. That may indeed be the way to start philosophical inquiry. Herodotus starts history with the desire to get the beginning right, quoting rival stories and announcing he will correct them; proclaiming the importance of the war he will tell about; seeking to describe the first wrong done to the Greeks and then – so that he will have started in the really right place – backing up five generations to the decisive event that led to that first wrongdoing.

26 Herodotus *Histories* 1.10.3.

27 Aristotle *Poetics* 1453a19, 1453b19–22.

28 Parker (1998, 161–165). Herodotus introduces Croesus with the word *turannos*, *Histories* 1.6.1; introduces Candaules the same way, 1.7.2.

Taken together Herodotus's two attitudes toward the rise of Gyges imply an astonishing first causation. Something decisive happened, but without shock or trauma. Tyranny entered the world, and then the world that tyranny had entered entered Greece. And yet nothing happened in that first moment that you could call *bad*.

## History made philosophical

Glaucon takes over the story as a beginning for philosophy rather than for history, not the beginning that philosophy sometimes has in the dialogues but something new: philosophy begun on purpose. In Book 1 of the *Republic* it happened only by chance that Socrates fell into conversation about justice with Cephalus and then Polemarchus. He'd been on his way home when Polemarchus invited him over, and so on. Then because Thrasymachus happened to be present, *he* leapt in, and they had a fracas about the value of justice. But even with that business behind them, Glaucon reopens the question deliberately. From this point on their conversation can have a genuine beginning.

As the paradigmatic case of tyranny, Gyges belongs at the beginning to show the worst that human beings might do and always want to do. Glaucon is challenging Socrates to describe some merit in justice that will offset the temptation toward antisocial behavior that finally manifests itself as tyranny. But the Gyges that plays such a role in philosophy will have to be a Gyges set into a different story. Let him seize power, but not as he did in the *Histories*. Glaucon will negate the elements of the story from Herodotus that denature the injustice in Gyges.

Herodotus tells of a passive Gyges first coerced into spying on the queen, then threatened with death if he does not assassinate Candaules. Glaucon removes character development and persuasion. No sooner has Gyges discovered what his new ring can do than he plans to overthrow the king. Picture him among his sheep the night before he found those subterranean treasures. Already he had been the type to turn into a tyrant. Right out of the gate he had the tyrannical impulse in him – and everyone else does too. *This* is where the first of unjust deeds comes from; Herodotus not only sets the date too late but also is misunderstanding an eternal cause into a historical one, as if we said that human beings first ate with the appearance of French restaurants.

In Herodotus a sign of Gyges' unwillingness to usurp the throne is his sexual innocence. He pleads not to look at the queen's naked body. His marrying her follows, as if as an afterthought, from his forced participation. As a genre, the stories about how Gyges took power are as committed to making a claim one way or other about the sexual relations between him and the queen, as they are to measuring the social upheaval that resulted. (The ancient popular mind, as I have said already, puts tyranny outside normal politics and outside legitimate sexuality. The force of this assumption causes

even the stories of tyrants' innocence to have to claim that innocence.) Nicolaus of Damascus has Gyges pursue the queen. The historian Pompeius Trogus claims that they were carrying on an illicit affair.[29] Herodotus denies relations between them.

In keeping with the demands of the genre, and differentiating his story from the one in the *Histories,* Glaucon specifies that Gyges "committed adultery with the king's wife and together with her took hold of the king and killed him and took over his reign." The detail stands out much as the embarrassed explanation does in Herodotus. Glaucon goes on to list what everyone would do with a ring of invisibility, and it unsurprisingly includes *suggignesthai* "sexual intercourse" with anyone you choose. That doesn't make it fit his story.[30] Where the queen is concerned, Glaucon is describing a seduction that enlists her in the cause, making her eager to help Gyges take the throne; but an invisible man can assassinate the king just fine by himself.

And for that matter, *how*? Seduction by an invisible man sounds like the occasion for an obvious joke. "Could you fall in love with an invisible man?" "Sure, because for me looks are not that important."

In later centuries Greeks told the story of Eros and Psyche, in which the god of love was an invisible seducer. I know of no versions of that tale dating back to Plato's time, but it would have reinforced the point that Glaucon's story makes, that Gyges as invisible lover is dominated by his *erôs*. If the Gyges narrative in Herodotus reads like a cover-up issued from the palace after a coup and making the new ruling couple as blameless as possible, Glaucon's version associates Gyges with as much blame and vice as possible, especially with the vice of unrestrained sexual desire.

Unrestrained desire unites Gyges with the otherwise mystifying bronze horse that he found the dead body in. Bronze horses were known in Greece for a century before Plato was born, and we hear about ancient kings and warriors buried with their horses. But we do not hear that those kings and warriors were buried naked, certainly not that they were *inside* their horses.[31] A more likely

29 Justin, a Roman historian, includes the Gyges story in his *Epitome* of Trogus: 1.7.14–19. It follows Herodotus in several details, except that Gyges spies on the wife of Candaules and falls in love with her (Smith 1902b, 362–363).

30 Plato *Republic* Book 2: Gyges committed adultery, 360b1–2; sexual intercourse with anyone, 360c1.

31 Smith contents himself with positing an explanation. "That the hero and magician of old, whoever he was, should have been buried in a horse rather than in an object of some other shape is probably a detail of some importance" (Smith 1902a, 274). But to say that is not to say what the importance is. Smith proposes mythological parallels (274n3); they are mostly inconclusive. Pindar *Pythian* 1.96–97 reports that the tyrant Phalaris roasted his enemies alive inside a bronze bull, and some readers draw on this allusion; thus McCoy 2020. This is one of the many points at which I have consulted and learned from McCoy's scholarship. But here I don't think the explanation fits. (1) This corpse is not referred to as charred or cooked. (2) Any tyrant cruel enough to strip and roast an enemy would have taken a ring so impressive that in a treasury full of prizes Gyges chose this, even tugging it off a rotten edematous finger. On bronze horses, Markman (1943).

scenario is suggested by a poem written by Bacchylides, the earliest source for one story about the Cretan queen Pasiphaë. Pasiphaë became enamored of Poseidon's sacred bull and hid inside a wooden cow decoy so that the bull would mount her. This coupling produced the Minotaur.[32] A person goes voluntarily into an artificial animal for the purpose of being inseminated by a live member of that species.

If Glaucon had wanted to substitute a figure of illicit sexuality for the chaste queen in Herodotus, a natural sequence of ideas would have led him to this horse. The opposite of an *aischuntheisa* queen or mother-figure, one who has been "shamed," would be a shameless mother. Of the several characters in mythology with names like Glaucon's, there was one Glaucus on Crete who died and was revived (as Socrates will promise Glaucon *he* will be revived), and whose mother was Pasiphaë.[33] If the story must begin with Gyges' look at an undressed body, then telling the same story with a decisive difference requires giving him, mythically Oedipalized, a Pasiphaë to look at. (I say this not purporting to analyze Plato, rather only finding Plato analyzing Glaucon.)

The *Republic*'s portrayal of the tyrant, as Socrates is wrapping up his argument, continues the theme of tyranny's perversions. Other chapters have cited the Greek tyrant's archetypal perversions to the point of incest, and incest comes up again when Book 9 describes the soul's *paranomai* "lawless" desires. But in Book 9 what a soul unlawfully desires in its dreams can include *thêria* "beasts." Normal souls only dream about such forbidden objects; the tyrannical soul lets itself indulge those dreams. The erotic tendency in the tyrant finally expresses itself in bestiality.[34]

Gyges found the remains of a tyrant whose power let him pursue every desire until he perished. Gyges gratuitously seduced the king's wife, for he has lusts of his own, so you can guess where he'll wind up. What sends him to the throne will finally and horribly send him to the grave.

32 Bacchylides fragment 26. The story is told at length by later authors, but the Bacchylides fragment shows it to be an early tradition. For the extended story, see "Apollodorus" *Library* 3.8–3.11; Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 4.77.1; Philostratus the Elder *Imagines* 1.16. In Plato's own time the behavior of Pasiphaë was alluded to in Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazusae* 153. Agathon has been saying that a poet who writes women's parts ought to have all women's bodily manners; Mnesilochus replies, "So you horse-ride when you compose Phaedra?" The verb *kelêtizeis* "horse-ride," derived from a word referring to jumping from horse to horse, seems to have been used to describe an oversexed woman, as if because such a nature would engage in equine intercourse. Moreover Phaedra was the daughter of Pasiphaë, therefore possibly assumed to possess her sexual habits.

33 Glaucus son of Pasiphaë, "Apollodorus" *Library* 3.3.1, Hyginus *Fabulae* 136. When Socrates introduces the subject of immortality he tells Glaucon, *athanatos hêmôn hê psuchê* "our soul is deathless": Plato *Republic* 10.608d3–4.

34 Plato *Republic* Book 9: tyrannical man examined, 571a ff.; *paranomai* desires, 571b4; beasts included, 571d1–2; tyrannical soul's dreams come true, 574d–e.

Glaucon moves past the mention of the horse. He is a man of *thumos* "spirit," a warlike and honorable man, and the case of Leontius later in the *Republic* demonstrates that *thumos* is the part of you that objects to your looking at naked corpses.[35] So Glaucon even in the telling averts his soul's eyes. As if he were a steganographic messenger in Herodotus, he doesn't notice that he has communicated the *Republic*'s argument against immoral behavior, which we might telescope into terrifying advice: Let yourself go undetected into full injustice and you will find yourself the sexual partner of a horse.

The likeness of mind between Gyges and the corpse, or the potential for them to grow ever more like-minded, implies that this man dead by misadventure had also been a tyrant. The wonders in the cave, presumably treasures, imply the same. Whether or not archaic tyranny actually arose in step with the invention of currency, as P. N. Ure argued a century ago, it is certainly the case that the Greeks associated wealth with tyrannical rule.[36] We find the attitude expressed in Plato in a comment about the wealth of Polycrates. Before Plato, Theognis spoke of the tyrant's *chrêma "*money"; and Sophocles' Oedipus the tyrant warns Creon that Creon will need *chrêmata* "money, funds" if he intends to take over.[37]

For that matter the gold ring on the corpse denotes coinage, as rings did in antiquity.[38] This would have been no accident, given the Greek stereotype of Lydia as birthplace of money,[39] a stereotype that would continue to the country's proverbially rich final ruler Croesus. Gyges seems to have chanced upon another tyrant's treasure trove plus his secret weapon for acquiring power.

That it took an earthquake to expose the wonders must mean they had been buried long before. Adrienne Mayor has shown the widespread extent of ancient Greek excavations, and chance discoveries in the earth of what the ancients considered antiquity. The Greeks misinterpreted dinosaur bones as the remains of mythical griffins, but correctly took buried remains to be remnants from another human era, usually calling that the time of the Trojan War.[40] It is also notable that classical cities might set out to find ancient heroes'

35 Plato *Republic*: Socrates calls Glaucon "always most courageous," 2.357a3; Adeimantus compares him to the timocratic man dominated by *thumos* (although Socrates qualifies that comparison), 8.548d5–6; Leontius and the corpses, 4.439d–440a. Commentators debate why Leontius should want to look at the corpses, but without settling that question we can agree that he desires to do so, and that this desire conflicts with his angry *thumos*.

36 Ure (1922). Seaford (2004) has returned to these topics.

37 Tyrants and money: Plato *Meno* 90a4, Theognis 197, Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus* 542.

38 See Genesis 24:22 for rings as Biblical coinage.

39 For coinage as Lydian, see Ure (1922, 129) and Seaford (2004, 125–127). The earliest Greek claims about Lydia and money are Xenophanes (according to Pollux *Onomasticon* 9.83) and Herodotus *Histories* 1.94.1. Seaford has cause to doubt these claims, as perhaps reflecting the Greek projection of an unsavory invention onto foreigners; but what counts here is where the Greeks believed money came from, not where it actually did.

40 Mayor (2000, 15–51).

skeletons, as Argos did with the bones of Orestes. What they found (as Mayor says) were probably the skeletons of large mammals, like bears. Regardless, the Greeks of Plato's time expected bodies from the mythical past to be very large.[41] The size of that corpse that Gyges finds again indicates the great age of the treasure trove.

If the dead man's wealth and sexual extravagance do indeed mark him as a tyrant, a great age for the burial chamber means that tyranny existed long before Gyges. (The myth of Er will say much the same thing, near the end of the *Republic*, when it reports on the punishment of a tyrant who'd died a millennium before.[42]) Glaucon's argument entails nothing less. For if the rise to power that Gyges engineers is what anyone would do with a ring like his, the psychological preconditions for tyranny exist everywhere in all times. Tyranny had no beginning. Fittingly, immortal Zeus could be called a tyrant.[43]

Glaucon's story makes Gyges the agent of change that Herodotus almost refuses to let him be. (Herodotus finishes *his* tale of Gyges with the pointed remark that after ascending the throne and conquering Colophon, the man did nothing of note in the 38 years of his reign.[44]) According to Glaucon his malevolence sets off a whole sequence of events.

And yet there is something peculiarly inconsequential about Glaucon's Gyges. He established a tyranny that followed innumerable others, and we may expect countless more tyrannies ahead. Herodotus showed how folly can flower into tyranny; Glaucon's revision of the tale presumes a tyrannical impulse already fully flowering in every heart. Where Herodotus told a story intended not to resemble any other (because unlike every other tale of how the big war started), Glaucon has Gyges generalize to all human beings.

History tells *ta genomena* "what comes to be, what happens" and poetry *hoia an genoito* "what would happen," Aristotle says. So he pronounces poetry "more philosophical."[45] Glaucon is illustrating this difference by transforming the stuff of history into a more philosophical tale that is really not about a kingdom in Asia Minor but about the failed state of every soul's constitution. Achieving philosophical generality means finding culpability everywhere, of which this tyranny is only one example.

## Tyranny in history

The philosophical meaning of Glaucon's story, that tyranny is always possible, underscores the need for a steadfast opposite to the tyrant's rule. When

41 Mayor (2000: large skeletons attributed to heroes, 104–156); Plato's Gyges tale among folk tales about archaeological discoveries, 193.

42 Plato *Republic* 10.615c–d.

43 For Zeus as *turannos* "tyrant" in fifth-century Athens, see Aeschylus *Prometheus* 736; Aristophanes *Clouds* 564; Gorgias *Encomium of Helen* 3. Another resemblance between this tyrant and Zeus is the invisibility associated with the gods.

44 Herodotus *Histories* 1.14.4.

45 Aristotle *Poetics* 1451b1–7.

Socrates begins describing a city so that they can find the justice in it, the specter of tyranny potentially everywhere motivates his making that city as good as possible. A good-enough city would suffice for a good-enough world; a practically tyrannical world calls for a spectacular exception.

The *Republic* does not explicitly address the possibility of ubiquitous tyranny. After all Glaucon did not pose the challenge explicitly. And Plato might not want to rule that frightening possibility out. If the review of constitutional types in Book 8 is meant as a claim about historical change, it implies that in the very long run tyrants will govern all cities. Socrates charts a city's decline from the best constitution, that of the *Republic*'s good city, to a second-best, a military regime resembling what Athenians knew about Sparta,[46] then onward to oligarchy. Democracy follows and leads into tyranny. Socrates offers no explanation of how tyranny might lead to something else (presumably something better, tyranny being as it is the worst), so that barring miracles history must lead to tyrannies everywhere, and universal darkness buries all.

For the most part the constitutional decline runs parallel to a generational decline in types of character, the democratic soul appearing as the child of an oligarchically souled man by analogy to the democratic city's evolution out of the instabilities latent in an oligarchical city. The sequence of cities helps to illustrate the sequence of souls, as you would expect it to do on the assumption that justice and injustice in a constitution display large-scale the traits and internal ordering found in a soul.[47] But the psychological laws that make someone tyrannical or timocratic of soul function as eternally effective, operating independent of the historical conditions that produce political tyranny or timocracy. So it can happen that oligarchical souls arise in a democracy. And while tyranny requires a tyrannical soul in its ruler, tyrannical souls can exist without tyranny.

The disanalogy between political and psychological sequences of decline means that even a population full of depraved souls will not fill the earth with tyrannical constitutions. And if Book 8 does offer its chronicle as a history – as it must do to acknowledge the possibility of universal tyranny – that history sets limits on the appearances of tyranny.

Given what Plato knew about political forms in Athens, the historical sequence he outlines is fanciful. In (roughly) his grandparents' time Athens lived through the Pisistratid dynasty of tyrants and replaced that tyranny with democracy. When Plato was 16 or so the democracy briefly became an oligarchy; in his 20s he saw Athens governed by "the Thirty,"[48] a group put into

46 Plato *Republic* 8.544d, 8.545b.

47 Mark Zelcer and I have argued that the same historical sequence appears in the funeral speech of the *Menexenus* (Pappas and Zelcer 2013).

48 The name "30 Tyrants" for this group came into use later. Contemporaries call them *hoi triakonta* "the Thirty": Plato *Apology* 32c3–5, *Letter* 7.324c–325a; Xenophon *Hellenica* 2.3.1–2. Associating this group backed by Sparta with Spartan-style governance must be tentative; after all Xenophon uses the verb *turannein* "to act the tyrant" of the Thirty, *Hellenica* 2.4.1, and both he and Plato's *Apology* call their reign "oligarchy." But even calling the Thirty an oligarchy means that oligarchy succeeded democracy, in reverse of what the *Republic* identifies as the causal order.

power by Sparta, which was the *Republic*'s model for timocracy. In other words, Plato knew of or saw firsthand the historical ordering tyranny–democracy–oligarchy and then perhaps timocracy, which is to say the opposite ordering of cities (excluding the good city) from the order given in *Republic* 8.

Leave aside the forceful pessimism at work in reversing a historical sequence to prove that constitutions decline. (If you insist that Book 8 is not meant as historical sequence, its undeniable ranking of the constitutions still implies that Plato saw Athens improving when it went from tyranny to democracy and from democracy to oligarchy.) An analysis of constitutional change that goes so far beyond mere cherry-picking reads as a specific political message. So I am persuaded by Cinzia Arruzza's argument that Plato's account displaces tyranny from the position that Athenian democracy assigned to it, at the antipodes to democracy, to make it adjacent to democracy as democracy's natural completion.[49] The corollary to her reading is that the *Republic*'s new constitution stands at the furthest distance from tyranny. It enjoys the best protection from tyranny, given how many steps a city will have to go through from that height before reaching the lowest constitution.

The point generalizes. Tyranny is not possible at all times. Even if the punishments for tyrannical desire, as foreshadowed in the corpse-in-horse, do not dissuade one from *thinking* as tyrants do, that way of thinking will not always lead one to *act* as tyrants do. Thus Socrates says that a tyrannical soul must exist in a city prepared for takeover before it becomes an actual tyrant. Tyranny springs from the roots of a protectionist regime "and from nothing else," hence from no other political–economic scenario. A causal inexorability not chance seems to bring tyranny about, for Socrates says that once a man appears who promises to cancel debts, and otherwise looks ready to rule, he will by *anagkê* "necessity" either be killed or take over.[50] A democracy marked by a divide between rich and poor creates the possibility for tyrannical rule that had not been found in other cities. The possibility creates the necessity.

Within the democracy in which Plato writes (and within the earlier version of that democracy in which the *Republic*'s conversation is set and Socrates is speaking) the point hardly matters. Civic collapse and tyranny lie just ahead. Why *not* declare tyranny the way of the world? But for those who live under a nondemocratic constitution, most of all for those living in the *Republic*'s good city, the horrid unsaid message in Glaucon's story has been tempered. Things will get a little worse before they get a lot worse.[51]

49 Arruzza (2018).

50 Plato *Republic* Book 8: unlucky tyrannical soul becomes tyrant, 578c1; tyranny only from protector's state, 565d1–2; tyranny flowers by necessity, 566a2–3.

51 Near the end of the *Republic*, in the myth of Er, a soul is seen choosing the life of a tyrant: 10.619b–c. Does this mean tyranny is possible everywhere, and that possessing a tyrannical soul suffices to make one a tyrant? That does not follow. One chooses tyrannical power, therefore chooses the life of someone born into a city ripe for tyranny. The soul in question chooses a circumstance in which power can be seized. As it leads that life it will become perforce a tyrannical soul. Indeed, the myth (about which Chapter 5 has more to say) warns that choosing a kind of life will *imply* an ordering of soul that leads that life: 10.618b–d.

Maybe (although it is not necessary to ascribe this point to the *Republic*) the distinction among cities shows how Glaucon misreads political reality. As the product of Periclean democracy he sees tyranny threatening – because in fact it does threaten democracy – and, overgeneralizing, projects that threat on to all human societies. The powerful Alcmaeonids, the family that Pericles belonged to, were said to have derived their fortune from Lydia, specifically by gathering gold in a treasure room.[52] That Lydian tyranny seems to Glaucon like something that can happen anywhere is only a reminder of the tyrannical elements lurking in what he knows of democracy. Tyranny lies in wait in the family of Pericles.

Nevertheless the burden of proof remains on anyone who promises to refute Glaucon's hypothesis. The "thought experiment" gets everyone imagining the pleasures to be derived from a ring of invisibility[53]; it will take some doing to show that this "everyone" is really only everyone in a democracy. Glaucon has passed this theme of Herodotus's Gyges story along unchanged amid all the alterations: Tyranny can arise anywhere, at any time. As the messenger slave carried a communiqué on his scalp obliviously, Glaucon may well not even realize that he has kept this Herodotean idea in his story. It's in there, though, still demanding an answer.

## Do the *polis* in different voices

If steganography is possible whenever a message arrives, the many quotes and allusions from other authors in the *Republic* offer more opportunities for surplus or subversive meanings comparable to the fears about tyranny that came in with the Gyges story.

The *Republic*'s censoring mentions of poetry and poets draw such attention to themselves that it is easy to think of those as the exemplary insertions of outside voices into the *Republic*'s argument. They certainly matter; and it matters to our sense of the *Republic*'s conversation that the dialogue can make its review of other authors so explicit. We are talking about things that everyone cares about: gods, heroics, social relations. What do you think people have been talking about all this time?

The difference, or the limitation of those passages, is that Socrates' guard is up when he sifts through Greek epic and tragedy in search of a curriculum. They will cut verses out of poems and deny some playwrights the budget needed to stage their work. Even in conciliatory moments the *Republic* treats poetry as a defendant before a tribunal, something to be tolerated only if it answers the charges that philosophers have brought.[54] In this mood the

52 See Herodotus *Histories* 6.125, and discussion in Fornara and Samons (1991, 9–13).

53 Here my argument depends on the discussion in Shields (2006) of the ring-story as thought experiment, and on his assessment of its considerable effectiveness.

54 Plato *Republic*: cut verses out, for example, 2.378b–d; deny a chorus, 2.383c; poetry before a tribunal, 10.607b–d.

*Republic*'s participants are far removed from incorporating a poet into their conversation.

The most obvious and pervasive allusion incorporates Aristophanes as author of *Ecclesiazusae*/*Assemblywomen* into the *Republic*'s political proposals. In *Ecclesiazusae* the women of Athens take over the city, instituting collective meals and open homes reminiscent of what we find in Plato's city. While they are at it the women eliminate legally binding securities and legislate a kind of collective marriage between all men and all women.[55] Plato would have known *Ecclesiazusae* and almost indisputably wrote the *Republic* after it, which would imply some acknowledgment of Aristophanes in the *Republic*'s version of the city. Even if both works drew on a third source now lost, Plato wrote knowing *Ecclesiazusae* and expecting his readers to see the resemblance.[56]

The *Republic* also contains another clear nod to Herodotus, who depicts the Persian king Darius debating with two men about the relative merits of rule by one, by a few, or by the majority. Although "how many govern" is the only defining criterion for a type of government in that conversation, it can be said to contain a taxonomy of monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy. Otanes and Megabyzos, the two other men, argue for the alternatives to monarchy, introducing the question – "Which constitutional form is best?" – that the *Republic* will answer at length and with a strict ordering of regimes.[57]

Some authors enter the discussion in a passing anecdote, as Sophocles does in Book 1, during the *Republic*'s opening words from Cephalus. As noted above, Cephalus reports that someone approached Sophocles in his old age, asking – because Sophocles had long been known as an erotic man – "How's the sex?" He replied not with the expected salacious news about some fresh seduction but putting the questioner in his place. In his elder years, Sophocles told the man, he fled from his lust like a slave from a crazy *despotên* "master."[58]

55 Aristophanes *Ecclesiazusae*: vision of the new city, 590–710; common meals, 676–677, 835–852; open homes, 673–675; lawsuits, 566; marital laws, 614–629. Plato *Republic*: vision of the new city, 5.451c–461e; common meals, 3.416e; open homes, 3.416d; lawsuits, 3.405a; marital laws, 5.458c–d.

56 The problem of *Ecclesiazusae* was noted in Chapter 1. Readers have long commented on the similarities between the two reformed cities. Did Aristophanes see an early version of the *Republic*, or hear what the Academy's philosophers were talking about, and mock those reforms in a play? (Sheer speculation, and still presumes a very early composition for the *Republic*.) Or did Plato take up themes from a comedy and turn them into serious philosophical proposals? (This is the easiest to believe. New ideas often sound like jokes, so there is no contradiction in hearing a joke as a fresh idea.) Or did some lost third source first propose these ideas, so that Plato and Aristophanes are both responding to that lost source? (A theoretical possibility, but then Aristotle treats these political proposals as if no one before Plato had put them forward. He would have mentioned the third source.) See Nancy Demand (1982) for a proposal about what a third source might have been.

57 Herodotus *Histories* 3.80–82.

58 Sophocles: known for erotic inclinations, Plutarch *Life of Pericles* 8.8, cf. Cicero *De Officiis* 1.144; also Athenaeus *Deipnosophistai* 13.603e; anecdote told by Cephalus, Plato *Republic* 1.329b6–c5.

Old age brings calm and freedom, or so Cephalus explains the tale. But Cephalus also imports messages that he doesn't think to say: that a life governed by sexual desire is a mad one; more broadly that sexual desire resembles political despotism. In other words – though not in the words that come out of Cephalus, who's insensitive to the thought that he carries a moral psychology with him – there is some order common to the individual human and the social world containing that human. The city is the soul writ large.

Already in the *Republic*'s first pages an imported voice speaks of tyranny through a character who doesn't even take the material he uses to be material about tyranny. Already here as again in the story about Gyges, tyranny characterizes human life.

We can easily read the steganography at work in this passage as Plato's planted message. The virtue that Cephalus represents is respectable, but it reveals its conventionality when it acquiesces in rule by desire. Socrates will call on his audience to imagine a new virtue found in a soul that governs and controls its appetites.

Thus in Plato's *Protagoras* Socrates remarks on the same phenomenon when he finishes giving his interpretation of a poem by Simonides. In the poet's absence, he says, anyone can ascribe any meaning to words from an *allotria phônê* "outside voice." In the *Republic* Socrates acknowledges that a sordid tale about the gods may have a legitimizing *huponoia* "hidden sense."[59] It's a "friendly" steganography when the stories from Cephalus and Glaucon reinforce the threat of tyranny to which Socrates will reply, but reinforce that threat without the storytellers' noticing. Elucidating the conditions of this steganography belongs in a process we may call reading toward completion.

And yet the glimpse of meanings' eluding their courier may bring a reader to wonder what else one of these outside voices might be saying, not behind a character's back but behind the author's too. Drawing out those other ideas contributes to a reading that seeks incompleteness. No one yet has succeeded in controlling all the communications made by everyone in a conversation. If sexual desire looks like a despot to people, what will a ruler look like, to the people being ruled, who is described as erotic?[60]

What about the *Republic*'s reorganization of the debate Darius has with the other conspirators who worked with him to seize control of Persia, and who now argue for democracy or oligarchy as the best form of government? There is a suggestion in Herodotus's anecdote that power tends to concentrate, in the warning that an oligarchy contains powerful men each wanting to be the

59 Plato: after reading of Simonides, *Protagoras* 347e; interpretations of myths, *Republic* 2.378d.

60 See Plato *Republic* 5.475b about the philosopher's desiring all wisdom, resembling in this desirousness the lovers of young men, 474d–e; also 6.485b–d; and discussion later in this chapter. Arruzza insightfully writes that the tyrant in Plato should "be better understood as a philosophical nature gone astray" (Arruzza 2018, 137). The power of the love–desire that is present in both types will also make them look alike.

one head.[61] The idea of additional constitutions eludes these characters, as does the idea that some new analysis might rank all governments and find a linear progression in histories.[62]

But for all that the theory grows as Plato repurposes Herodotus, the taxonomy of constitutions ought to bring the original scene to mind and its implications about political power. The episode is a skimpily disguised story of a bloody coup by a few men each of whom (in confirmation of Darius's argument) wants to rule alone. One says "Democracy" and another says "Oligarchy," but most of them like the answer "Rule by one," because they'd all like to be that one. The man who finds a way to get his stallion sexually aroused (Darius) outsmarts his fellow assassins and becomes king. Tyranny comes to be not because historical forces joined to create it, still less because an ingenious argument carries the day, but because making a test determine who rules will only hand power over to the one best at cheating on the test.[63]

## Aeschylus's Eteocles

Aeschylus[64] makes a notable example both of the outside voices[65] that the *Republic* incorporates into its argument, and of the insight those voices have to offer about tyranny.

It may appear that Aeschylus only speaks in order to be mistreated. He comes in for more than his share of criticism in Book 2. As the grand figure of tragedy from an earlier generation, Aeschylus says too many things that an impressionable young soldier should not hear. But even after the unsparing review of his verses, Aeschylus continues to be quoted, and to different effect. Geoffrey Bakewell has studied the Aeschylean entries into the *Republic* and found a development or progression in them over the course of the dialogue. Plato selects and shapes passages from Aeschylus so that they will have a salubrious effect on the body politic, making *Seven against Thebes* an attractive prayer to the gods "and an *egkômion tôi agathôi* [encomium to good] Eteocles." Given this reworking, Aeschylus's play "deserves a place in Kallipolis and in

61 Each oligarch, Darius says, wants to be the *koruphaios* "head man," that is, tyrant. Herodotus *Histories* 3.82.3.

62 Herodotus's *Histories* as a whole avoids linear accounts, typically depicting not time's arrow but its boomerang: "Many that were great have become small and those great in my time were previously small," 1.5.4; human affairs a *kuklos* "circle, wheel," 1.207.2; also see Solon to Croesus on wealth and luck, 1.32.

63 Herodotus *Histories* 3.81–87. The six participants in the Persian coup agree that the one whose horse neighs first the next day will take power. Darius's groom brings a mare to his horse for sex.

64 Bakewell (2017, 274).

65 Bakewell (2017, 260): "In Books 1 and 2 alone, Archilochus, Bias, Hesiod, Homer, Pindar, Pittacus, Simonides, and Sophocles all put in appearances. But pride of place goes to Aeschylus, whose works are cited at least seven times in the *Republic*."

the *Republic*."[66] If the selections from Aeschylus can be seen to reinforce traditional piety, the city may benefit from incorporating poetic voices into its literature. And already the literature *about* the city, which is to say the *Republic*, employs Aeschylus in its portrayal of the coming rulers.

First Glaucon quotes Aeschylus, paraphrasing his sentiment to avoid the dangers posed by poetic language.[67] Then Socrates returns to Aeschylus and quotes from *Seven against Thebes* – not just any Aeschylean tragedy, but a play about a ruler who seeks to control the music in his city. Indeed the ruler in that play, Eteocles, brings to mind the calculating principle that the *Republic* would put into ruling position in a soul or in the city.[68] Socrates would have the philosophical city's rulers control the songs heard in that magical place; songs very much include the so-called "goat song" that is tragedy; and here is one such song proposing the oversight that monitors songs as a whole. A turn of this kind leaves the philosophical planners of a city following tragedy's lead. In these appropriations of Aeschylus by both Socrates and Glaucon, the external voices even steer the *Republic* toward certain of its desired conclusions. Generalizations about expelling the poets do not capture the more complex movements that Aeschylean poetry makes into and out of the *Republic*.

I would only press further with these Platonic mentions of *Seven against Thebes*, whose ruler Eteocles raises more questions about the rulers in Plato's city. Eteocles is one of two sons of Oedipus, Polyneices the other. The brothers command Thebes together and agree to take turns governing. Eteocles goes first and his term ends and he refuses to turn the city over as promised. Their sister Antigone will say that Polyneices suffered a wrong. Polyneices attacks Thebes together with his allies, one hero to charge each of the seven gates of Thebes, Polyneices himself attacking the seventh and carrying a shield that bears the emblem of *dikê* "justice."[69]

Eteocles mocks the appeal to the word "justice," for what *Seven against Thebes* depicts is the brothers' battle to the death over who is entitled to claim *dikê*. "*Dikê* is the object of desire for both brothers."[70]

The insistence in both brothers' claims to justice reveal how tenuous an argument for tyrannical power is. In other contexts a son might claim legitimate inheritance.[71] The predicament of Eteocles and Polyneices shows that

66 Bakewell (2017, 274).

67 Bakewell (2017, 263); the reference is to Plato *Republic* 2.361b5–8.

68 Bakewell (2017): "Voice of Aeschylus": *Seven against Thebes* about a ruler who bans some songs, 271; "Eteocles resembles *to logistikon* [the calculating element]," 273. See Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 267–270 on changing tunes; for irrational shouting, 186.

69 Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes*: Antigone on Polyneices suffering wrong, 1055; shield saying *dikê*, 646.

70 Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 659–676. On the battle over who is entitled to the word *dikê*, see Zeitlin (2009, 94–97). "*Dikê* is the object of desire" Zeitlin (2009, 97).

71 When Aristotle surveys the means by which a tyrant acquires his position, he seems to omit inheritance: Aristotle *Politics* 5.5–10 1310b15–1313a15. The *Politics* does *imply* tyrannical

inheritance with its assumption of a surrounding legal system fails to contain the tyrant who supersedes legality. Here by the way is one reason for the Greeks to have called Zeus *turannos*, which is to say a respect in which tyrants reminded the Greeks of gods. Zeus gladly couples and invariably fertilizes when he does, but differs from human parents in rejecting any hint of inheritance. The tyrant too resembles ordinary fathers in sexual enjoyment and ceases resembling them when the question of inheritance comes up. For a tyrant to inherit his position as one inherits a house or money could be made possible in any system *except* tyranny. Where are the courts to approve a legal arrangement, or an army to enforce it?

The case of Eteocles illustrates the point. An agreement about alternating terms of office has no meaning when tyrants refuse to be bound by agreements. In that situation inheritance won't go through smoothly either. No institution beneath the tyrant can crown the tyrant.

Bakewell shows how the speakers in the *Republic* shape their references to Aeschylus to reinforce the legitimacy of the new city's leadership. As adapted, the verses do reinforce traditional piety. But what remains unadapted, the story those verses come from and bring into the *Republic*, evokes the chaos in which a new order imposes itself: no authority above, no exit ahead. (Solon of Athens allegedly called tyranny a good situation to be in while you're in it, "but with no disembarking [*apobasin*]."[72]) Even a challenger who comes with justice on his shield, as a philosopher might, has no sure way in. For all our good intentions quoting Aeschylus, he steganographically presses the question of how the philosophers intend to establish and sustain the new order. As it did in Lydia through the random discovery of a ring of invisibility, and in Persia with the king's groom's trick to make the horse whinny, so too in Thebes tyranny enters as interruption to a coherent order rather than as a progression within it.

The story about Gyges, the personification of (Sophocles') sexuality as tyrannical, and the reminiscence of Eteocles seeking to preserve his reign, all come into the *Republic* as something other than direct communications from their authors; more like available materials that Plato assembles into his dialogue's argument. So the Gyges tale becomes a challenge to moral philosophy to justify virtue even when vice is available. Sexuality as dominating motive poses the question: When can the erotic impulse lead to wisdom rather than enslavement? The portrayal of Eteocles by Aeschylus offers the new city's planners stirring words about preserving a regime and strengthening it with the right kind of music.

inheritance, for example, at 5.12 1315b11–34, when describing the tyrannies that lasted the longest time. The "sons of Orthagoras" at Sicyon presumably earned their power by inheriting it. Aristotle seems to consider inheritance something other than a normal tyrannical means, for the reason that under tyranny the normal legal protections fail to hold.

72 Plutarch *Life of Solon* 14.5.

What if the imported words *refuse* to obey their new master? Having brought steganography into the *Republic*'s conversation, Plato primes his readers to look in other allusive passages for words and suspicions that challenge the *Republic*'s conclusions. Whereas Glaucon's undetected message punishes the tyrant with shameful death, the words from Aeschylus worry the reader that if these splendid plans hatching in the all-night feast of words should end up producing a tyranny in Athens, no other institution will be there to rescue the city. In these cases the *Republic* unknowingly transmits the message that tyranny might appear anywhere, driven by untameable sexual urges, and seeming to be a just state. These voices from outside never completely digested by the *Republic*'s argument tell how the city looks from outside, as the shouts in Plato's *Apology*[73] remind us in what hostile fashion Socrates was heard by the jury.

## The sudden appearance of justice

One problem is that the tyranny whose ubiquitous threat Plato could find attestations to in other authors did not quite behave as the *Republic* claims it to. The *Republic* describes a historical necessity for tyranny that denies a Greek tradition – as represented in the Gyges of Herodotus – of its spontaneous origin.

Nor does the tyrant's person quite match his portrayal in the *Republic*. Plato assembles elements from the Greek tradition into such a compelling sketch of depravity as to obscure other aspects of the type as the tradition imagined it.

The sons of Oedipus came from a royal family, their father's fate having been so twisted that he could only hear the news of his legitimacy on the throne with terror. But early references to tyranny left the tyrant's origin and identity unspecified. He came out of nowhere.[74]

The first example of tyranny in mainland Greece may have been Corinth, in the person of Cypselus and the dynasty he established there in the later seventh century, a generation after Gyges. Herodotus presents Cypselus's arrival to power in connection with Delphic oracles, like the prediction that "an eagle is laboring [*kuei*] in the rocks and shall bear [*texei*] a lion."[75] The coming of the tyrant to Corinth will resemble a biologically impossible birth.

Less allegorically but to similar effect the poet Theognis had pictured a new man coming to his hometown Megara. Theognis wrote in the century before Herodotus, when he could hear about fresh tyrannies just then springing up around Greece. He warned that Megara was ripe for a takeover. The city's

73 Plato *Apology*: Socrates tells the jurors not to *thorubein* "shout, make noise," implying that they have done so or are about to, 17d, 20e, 21a, 27b, 30c (twice).

74 In what follows and most of all in elucidations of the contrast between tyrant and founder, I am indebted to McGlew (1993).

75 Herodotus *Histories* 5.92b.3.

leaders were bent on wickedness. "The city is laboring [*kuei*] and I'm afraid lest she bear [*tekêi*] a man to correct our wicked *hubris*."[76]

But in addition to coming of an unspecified origin, the person Theognis describes is *euthuntêr* "one who corrects, one who straightens out," a reformer. Eteocles and Polyneices were not the only tyrants who laid claim to the title "just ruler." The spontaneity of the tyrant's first appearance is thought to be compatible with his repairing a city gone wrong, even if he corrects the city with methods that make an observer afraid. Spontaneity is even called for. Any planned change of rule would probably keep the corrupt old ways intact.

Herodotus finds the commitment to justice among non-Greek tyrants too. Gyges stood up for the queen's injured dignity when he murdered her husband and seized command. Among the Medes (later absorbed into the Persian Empire), their king Deioces gained his throne in the first place because he made a reputation for himself as a just judge. As king he then surrounded himself with the bodyguards that Plato considers the trappings of tyranny, and with all other symbols of royalty. But he was "tough about protecting what was just."[77] Protecting what was just in this passage is *to dikaion phulassôn* literally "guarding the just," acting in other words as *phulax* "guardian" as the *Republic* calls the good city's rulers.

Herodotus plays down whatever violence Deioces resorted to (although he does note that the new king immediately wanted bodyguards). The tyrants in Aristotle's *Politics* rise up with equal swiftness but more roughly, and still in service to justice. Megacles in Mytilene, who would become that city's first tyrant, gained a following when he faced down the Penthilids, as the local aristocrats called themselves. "When the Penthilids went around hitting people with clubs, Megacles and his friends took hold of them and did away with them."[78]

Aristotle finds an equalizing motive at work, "hatred toward the rich," behind tyrants' ascents to power in Athens and Megara. The corrective gesture in Athens involved Pisistratus's organizing a faction against residents of the plains, which was the richer farmland. In Megara, Theagenes slaughtered the prosperous citizens' cattle. He caught the cattle *epinemontas* by the river, pastured there and grazing illegally.[79] Aristotle's language suggests that the wealthy citizens of Megara were violating regulations for pasturing cattle. Theagenes must have sacrificed the herds and given out their cooked meat to the public in a show of force he could rationalize as distributive justice.

In Athens a figure from the Persian War, Aristides, had the nickname *dikaios* "the just," and was ostracized by the Athenians, a procedure customarily

76 Theognis 39–42.

77 Herodotus *Histories*: story of Deioces, 1.96–1.101; bodyguards, 1.98.2; signs of royalty, 1.99; "tough about protecting," 1.100.1 (McGlew 1993, 82).

78 Aristotle *Politics* 5: 1311b26–28.

79 Aristotle *Politics* 5: "hatred toward rich," 1305a23; Pisistratus against people of plains, 1305a24–25; Theagenes slaughtering cattle, 1305a25–26. See McGlew (1993, 74).

explained as the removal of a citizen thought to be amassing too much power. The famous anecdote about this vote, in which an illiterate ultrahick "annoyed to hear him called the Just everywhere," makes a nice moralizing contrast between resentful know-nothings and the man who nobly wrote his own name on the ballot to have himself expelled. But this illiterate voter seems to have known that "justice" is the insignia under which tyrants arrive.[80]

The brothers in *Seven against Thebes* both claiming *dikê* might have thought they sounded high-minded, but they were only repeating the words that brought Greek tyrants to power. No wonder that play's chorus reproaches Eteocles for having such a bad *erôs* "desire" for governance, craving power with the erotic charge that motivates tyrants.[81]

Against this backdrop, the *Republic*'s efforts to separate its good city from the tyrannical worst city by the number of constitutions between them suggests a worry that the two might look alike, especially if they both come suddenly to establish justice. The new city regulates its guardians to keep them from developing tyrannical souls, and also as we might suspect to keep them from being mistaken for tyrants. Socrates denies wealth to the guardian class; they can't touch gold or silver, where the tyrant comes equipped with currency. Eugenic control over the guardians' sexual relations, and a policy for preventing parent–child incest, all spelled out with the controlling enthusiasm of a bureaucrat, will protect against the sexual deviancy that marks a tyrant. For that matter, the eugenic oversight will ensure that no one appears out of nowhere as tyrants do.[82]

Even so we are told of the guardians' powerful erotic drives, which Socrates treats as the source of their virtue. Philosophers channel their erotic desire toward philosophical knowledge, thus weakening the current that is available for flowing toward boys and girls.[83] They have a strong *erôs*, just a better kind. Suzanne Obdrzalek worries that this desire to learn may seek its satisfaction "at the expense of the rest of the soul," the knowledge-loving set against the soul-controlling. The philosopher's eroticism is not as safe as the *Republic*'s quick treatment of it promises.[84]

The guardians will be called "saviors" in the new city, but then Zeus was frequently called "savior" in prayers too, as well as "tyrant." Looking at one

80 Plutarch *Life of Aristides*: Aristides called "the just," 6.1–2; ostracized, 7.2; illiterate ultrahick, 7.5–6. (Note that because this voter did not know Aristides, he could not have known that Aristides wrote his own name on the ostrakon; the story could only have come from Aristides. If just, he was not bashful.) Plutarch is writing this biography to praise Aristides and yet admits that he was believed to be making himself a "monarch," 7.1.

81 Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 687–688.

82 Plato *Republic*: guardians and wealth, 3.416d–e; control over sexual relations, 5.458e–459e; preventing incest, 5.461d.

83 Plato *Republic*: philosophers *erôsin* "are in love with" a kind of learning, 6.485b1; attachment to that is *epithumia* "desire," 5.475b3, 5, 6.485d3; other desires weakened, 6.485d3–4; see 6.490a–b, 6.499b–c.

84 Obdrzalek (2013, 219). Tyrant and philosopher both erotic, Kahn (1987, 98).

another, the guardians will say "brother" and "sister" thanks to their collective breeding and rearing; Athenians remembering the Theban stories might be forgiven for thinking of Eteocles and Polyneices and the brotherly rule they established in the major city nearest Athens.[85]

Even ensuring sound characters for the philosophers in power only keeps tyranny from entering the city on the assumption that the tyrant's soul defines the tyranny, as opposed to the abrupt moment in which a *soi-disant* corrective act turns a city around. For if it is the moment of arrival that creates and constitutes a tyranny, the *Republic* has been calling for something disquietingly similar. If the time of coming to power, not the soul of the leader, makes the new constitution a tyranny, the *Republic* is running a risk it has looked away from.

## Tyranny and revision

Since World War II, the *Republic* has reminded so many readers of totalitarianism that it would be pointless either to rediscover those similarities now or deny them. But even without revisiting the topic we can review one implication that the discussion has brought to studies of the *Republic*. The utopian ideals at work in modern totalitarianism encourage one who detects totalitarian impulses in the *Republic* to see its political plan as utopian too, and if utopian then directed toward founding a city *de novo*. This implication or side effect of the accusation about totalitarianism is misguided. The *Republic* describes transformations to be enacted within an existing regime, not proposals for a state's new founding. But that fact does not let Plato off the hook. It is just the dialogue's political revisionism that would have made it call tyranny to mind in antiquity, quite aside from what makes it seem totalitarian today.

Plato's *Laws* shows by contrast, and in the course of one discordant passage, how the *Republic* contextualizes its political revisions. Malcolm Schofield reflects on the peculiarity in that passage. The speakers in the *Laws* have been contemplating the foundation of a new city in Crete; then Book 4 asks about creating the city, proceeding as if a city already existed and needed to be changed into a better one. What this distinct question applies to (says Schofield) is "the problematic of the *Republic*, where the issue is explicitly formulated as one about the minimal change needed to transform cities as they are into cities as they might be." The *Laws*' character Clinias even says

85 Plato *Republic* Book 5: guardians "saviors," 463b1; call one another family members, 463. For Zeus Savior see for example Pindar *Olympian Ode* 5.17. At a symposium the third libation from a cup of wine went to Zeus Savior, so that "third to the savior" became proverbial ("Third time's a charm"). See Pindar *Isthmian Ode* 3.10–11; in Plato see *Charmides* 167a; *Laws* 12.960c; *Philebus* 66d; *Republic* 9.583b. (On Thebes: Megara lay closer to Athens than Thebes did, but Thebes was the larger more menacing city, and its fall into tyranny would have struck the Athenians as specially significant.)

to the Athenian Stranger that the Stranger has a *kosmios* "orderly" tyrant in mind as the agent of change, a remark that Schofield reads as a critical look back to the *Republic*'s extreme plan for generating the good city. Someone capable of transforming a city into the *Republic*'s new regime will wield tempting power. (Clinias reads the *Republic* and sees tyrants at work.)[86]

To this challenge we may add one developed by Melissa Lane, who observes that the *Laws* stipulates the constitutional provisions that give its rulers power, but that "in the *Republic*, no law is said to be passed to establish kings as philosophers or philosophers as kings." Both the first founders and the later rulers are "extra-constitutional."[87]

The *Republic*'s act of political reform begins after Socrates creates a first city out of nothing. You may call Socrates this city's founder, and he presents it to the brothers as just, but the *Republic* veers away from it. Glaucon considers this primitive town unliveable; so Socrates enlarges it to include the goods and services Glaucon enjoys having in Athens: *mimêtai* "imitative artists," poets, and other luxuries.[88] All this stuffing will leave the city *phlegmainousan* "inflamed, festering." They will have to purge the city, as a doctor might give a feverish patient an emetic or enema.[89]

Almost every detail that follows about the new city's political organization therefore enters the argument as a transformation not a beginning *ex nihilo*. The old riddle about why Socrates abandons the healthy first city may come down to the difference between a founding and a reform. The analogy with medical treatment underscores that the change ought to repair or improve the city by treating the causes of its inflammation.

So the guardians' education, the expulsion of mimetic poets, and the standing army take a political establishment and turn it into something else. The first city was established where there had been nothing. This second place, the main object of attention for the *Republic*, can reach a condition in which we look in it to find justice only after revision or reform. People can create cities on new land, but this will not be one of them. If saying so makes the *Republic* sound less totalitarian to a modern audience because the city is not quite utopian, it also highlights the feature of the city that made it sound more like tyranny to ancients.

86 Plato *Laws* Book 4: how to establish the city, 708e–712a; orderly tyrant, 710d, 711a–b; Schofield (1997). On the *Laws* passage in question see the section "Legislator and Tyrant," 230–241; on "the problematic of the *Republic*," 230; the orderly tyrant a critique of the *Republic*, 240. On the peculiar turn in the *Laws* to talk of transformation, see Stalley (1983, 91–92). Schofield does observe that despite the *Republic*'s revisionist approach to politics it sometimes also speaks of "founding a settlement": 231n48.

87 Lane (2013, 113).

88 Plato *Republic* Book 2: first city presented as just, 371e; imitators added, then poets, 373b.

89 Plato *Republic*: inflamed, 2.372e7; *diakathairontes* "cleaning, purging," 3.399e5. Also see *kathairômen* "let's purify" the city, 3.399e8.

## The edited city

The *Republic*'s reform seeks to change the idea of reform. It has to start with what exists but not settle for politics as we know it.

Socrates nearing the end of Book 9, therefore near the end of what they'll say about a just city, tells Glaucon how a wise man will live. He will involve himself in politics, although maybe not in regular politics, the politics taking place in what Socrates refers to as his *patris* "fatherland, place of birth." He probably won't participate in regular politics, in fact, "unless some divine chance occur." And Glaucon knows what alternative Socrates means, where this kind of person can be political. "I understand [*manthanô*]," he says: "the one laid down in words [*en logois*]."[90]

In the absence of the *tuchê* "chance, good luck" that brings the new city into being, politics will confine itself to the city that consists in *logoi* "speeches, words, stories, arguments, and explanations." This is the city Socrates argued for, or as many translations call it a city of words. It is fitting that the *Republic*'s conversation has brought outside voices to contribute to their philosophizing. The writing-act of revising outside voices until they philosophize complements the *Republic*'s political-reformer act of transforming what cities have thus far been until they are a philosophical city. Socrates and the others set about looking at cities because justice in the soul, like a word in tiny script, can't be made out until it also appears in much larger writing.[91]

Plato draws attention to the resemblance between reform and revision with language of writing and rewriting in the *Republic*'s proposals for transforming the city as it is to the city they've been speaking of. When Socrates declares what philosophical governance would look like, he envisions it happening as takeover not as new beginning. It will be difficult to establish justice. The thought is *para doxan* "paradoxical, counterintuitive" but thinkable. We would need either that philosophers rule "in the cities" or that those who are now called kings, already established in power, come to philosophize authentically and ably.[92]

Socrates reprises the point in Book 6 anticipating the language of chance and divine aid that appears in connection with the "city of words." The change that will bring the city into existence will take place either *ek tuchês* "by chance," if a cadre of philosophers seizes power, or by godly action if *ek tinos theias epipnoias* "through some divine inspiration" a desire for true philosophy should befall those now in power, or their sons.[93] Modern readers

90 Plato *Republic* Book 9: maybe not in fatherland, 592a5–6; city in words, 592a7; also see 2.369c6.

91 Plato *Republic* 2.368d–e.

92 Plato *Republic* Book 5: paradoxical thought, 473e4; philosophers rule or rulers philosophize, 473c–d.

93 Plato *Republic* Book 6: by chance, 499b6; philosophers seize power, 499b3–7; divine inspiration, 499b7–c2.

may recognize the hope for a well-time political revolution in the Marxist tradition.

However you estimate the odds of this chance that puts philosophers in charge (about providential intervention one does not make book), both the divine and the stochastic opportunities for the city take it from its present political reality. Those now in power must be in power in an existing city. The gods come to rulers, rather than bringing rulers to power. The alternative that calls for luck and brings philosophers to govern also keeps them in the cities they are in, ruling *en tais polesin* "in the cities," not in new places.[94]

That would all seem to go without saying to readers today, in a world that contains no ungoverned places available for fresh starts. But Greek cities in the classical age had a history of founding "daughter" cities when their populations grew too large. The *apoikiai* "settlements" are not quite colonies, because no political arrangement bound them to the old city, and they were not established after the fashion of modern colonies, to procure raw materials or open up new markets. These new cities became autonomous entities, sometimes even allying themselves with the parent city's enemies, as Corcyra did to Corinth's surprise in the events precipitating the Peloponnesian War.[95]

And yet, significantly even when Socrates is fantasizing free from worldly constraints on the realization of the city, he does not suggest setting out to establish an *apoikia*.[96] When he turns "practical," or as you might also say frightening, he proposes expelling everyone over ten years old from the city proper to work in the surrounding farmland.[97] You can only do such a thing in an already-built city that has standing walls.

Back in the passage from Book 6 about establishing rule by philosophers, the language can sound just as alarming. In Socrates' words about needing chance or divine intervention, James McGlew hears the language Theognis had used about the reformer whose arrival he dreaded. The city would give birth – which sounds close to a god's intercessions – and the new ruler will correct the corruption that amounted to the city's *hubris*.[98]

In this context Socrates says that the populace, the many, will not mistrust "what we are saying," which is that the new city can flourish only if these philosophical artists *diagrapsein* their society with an eye to the divine pattern.[99]

94 Plato *Republic* 5.473c7–d1.

95 Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* Book 1: Corcyra an *apoikia* of Corinth, 25.3; seeks alliance with Athens, 31.2; to Corinth's surprise, 38.1–3.

96 Lane (2013) cites the law-giving symbolically performed by Socrates and his interlocutors, to place them in the tradition of Solon or Lycurgus. But she equates a lawgiver with a founder, and Solon did not found Athens.

97 Plato *Republic* 7.540e4–541a5.

98 McGlew (1993, 210).

99 Plato *Republic* Book 6: applying divine realities, 500d4–5; the many won't mistrust, 500e2; *diagrapsein*, 500e3–5.

Adeimantus balks, although he agrees to the general point. The people will trust the plan. It is the metaphor of *diagraphê* he doesn't understand.[100] Socrates explains that the philosopher takes up the city as if it were a *pinax* "board, plank," normally a tablet for writing or drawing on. The *pinax* must be made *katharan* "clean, blank." Many such tablets had raised edges to create a central area covered in wax. The wax could be smoothed out after writing and written in again. The philosopher performs an analogous act of smoothing on the city and then, looking back and forth between what is good and beautiful there, and what is to be done with humans here, makes the necessary marks. Lines are wiped out, reinscribed. As he tells of the process Socrates uses several versions of the verb *graphô*, or the noun *graphê*, or a compound made from them.[101]

The *graph-* words in this passage follow through on the image of reinscription. They begin with *diagraphô* and move through *zôgraphos* "artist" (twice), *diagraphê, graphô*, *eggraphô* "inscribe," and *graphê.* The first of these words that Socrates uses, the one that Adeimantus asks him to explain, is *diagraph-*, which appears as both verb and noun and describes an act of writing relative to writing that is already there: writing over and hence rewriting, but also "writing through," which is to say drawing a line through or deleting. Despite one brief reference to starting with a clean slate, the talk of revision makes the text in question one that is to be done again.[102]

In both poetry and prose of the time, *diagraphô* meant striking something out or writing it off. "Write her off as being bad," Euripides' Electra says about a woman. Strepsiades in Aristophanes' *Clouds* imagines burning away the *grammata* "letters" of a legal case against him, and puns that the suit will thereupon be *diagegraptai* "canceled."[103]

Within the *Republic* the verb has appeared, in Book 3, when Socrates rewrote Greek literature to make it safe for the new city's warriors. Homeric images of dying and the underworld bring a delicious shudder but don't belong in schools. "We will entreat Homer and the other poets not to take it hard if we delete [*diagraphômen*] these lines and others like them," the act

100 Plato *Republic* 6.501a1.

101 Plato *Republic* Book 6: city like *pinax*, 501a2; tablet made clean, 501a2, 6; philosopher inscribes looking back and forth, 501b1–7; wiping out and reinscribing, 501b8; words with *graph-* root, 500e4, 5; 501a1, 6; 501b8; 501c2.

102 Plato *Republic* 6.501a6–7. Even this mention of a *katharan* "clean" slate that the philosopher receives can be taken to mean not that it's a city that had always been clean, only that someone else cleaned it first.

103 The root *diagraph-*: Euripides *Electra* 1073; Aristophanes *Clouds* 774. The nullification of a suit seems to have been called *diagraphê* in legal documents from the time when Plato was writing: Lysias 17.5, Demosthenes 48.26. A century after Plato, *diagraphô* referred to textual deletion among Alexandrian editors (Montanari 2015, 654n47). The word loses its legal significance in those Hellenistic uses but not the meaning of erasure or cancellation.

now resembling a red-pencil review of the Homeric epics.[104] These texts will be written over for use in the new version of the old city. The philosopher–ruler's *diagraphê* of the city will require an educational program for its young soldiers that includes a *diagraphê* of the poetry they hear: poetry undone, reimagined, written over. It is under these conditions that the old poetic skins can hold philosophy's new wine.

There is no surprise in finding language for political reform from Socrates that he had used in connection with poetry. We do our political thinking with questionable words that someone else put in our mouths. The *Republic* only proceeds further than any other dialogue on the basis of what this truth entails, that the old culture's words be reshaped before they can take their place in the new world. Revision begins as soon as Socrates and his friends imagine setting the city straight. Literal word-changing is only one example of the revision to be undertaken.

## The opposite of tyranny

That the *Republic* revises the city makes the project sound less like fantasy. Add something to the city you know and take something else away and you'll have an Athens of a splendid kind, maybe only matched by Athens as it existed in the legendary past.

This description of the *Republic* does not depend on metaphors of old wax tablets wiped clean. Consider also that as Socrates pictures the good city his imaginary governance consists in expulsions not departures. During the transitional period adults live outside the city walls. The rulers – "we," as Socrates says – will send mimetic poets away with a religious ceremony resembling the expulsion of a scapegoat.[105] As he had proposed when their attention first shifted to an inflamed city in need of purification, Socrates remedies the ills of society by forcing someone else to leave rather than by escaping to an innocent place.

Socrates does sometimes use the noun *oikistês* "founder" to describe himself and his interlocutors in their capacity as theorists of the new city. More often than that he describes what they are doing with the verb *oikizô* "found." But those words did not necessarily carry the technical sense of establishing communities. They could mean living in a new house or metaphorically to

104 Plato *Republic* Book 3: images of dying and underworld eliminated, 386c3, 387b9; entreat Homer, 387b1–3.

105 Plato *Republic* 3.398a: *proskunoimen* "we would bow down" before the mimetic poet, call him *hieron* "sacred" and *thaumaston* "miraculous," and anoint his head and crown him with a woolen wreath. Compare the scapegoat ritual enacted during a plague in Massila, when a poor man was fed excellently for a year, then dressed in sacred vestments and run out of town (Burkert 1985, 83). On the religious meanings in the *Republic*'s treatment of mimetic poetry see Pappas (2013).

being given a new status.[106] In the *Republic*'s argument the word could naturally apply to living in a new version of the same old Athens.

Significantly too the noun *archêgetês* "leader, progenitor," used more precisely about a new society's founder, does not appear in the *Republic*. Pindar calls Tlepolemos *archêgetês* for creating cities on Rhodos, and the word does appear elsewhere in Plato to mean a founder.[107]

The categories did not blur into each other; "the opposition between the tyrant and the founder pervades classical political culture." A founder collected other emigrants and left the home city and typically never returned. Plato's dialogues portray Socrates as one who stays in town, both over the course of his life and at its end, when he will not flee to escape execution.[108]

The *Republic* says that divine intercession might turn a ruler's head to philosophy, but then divine intercession could have produced a new city. An inscription in Cyrene credited that city's existence to the command from Apollo that *automatixen* "spontaneously impelled" Battus to go to Libya.[109]

The difference between the two political functions, a difference that appears as early as Homer, involves taboos that the Greek world associated with founders. New cities begin with murderers forced from their homes.[110]

The *Iliad* speaks of Tlepolemus who killed his uncle and went to Rhodos and started a city; in Thucydides there is Alcmaeon, who killed his mother then founded Acarnania. Odysseus was killed, according to one tradition, by his son Telegonus, who later founded Tusculum and Praeneste. One of the last Hellenistic sources reports that Leucippus founded a city near Ephesus after committing both incest and patricide. Writing later, Pausanias and Plutarch pass along similar tales, not with family killings but still aggravated homicides. Pausanias's more indirect story concerns a messenger of Apollo, and Koroibos of Argos who kills her. Plutarch begins his story with unrequited love in Corinth and the killing of the beloved boy, whose murderer Archias then left home to found Syracuse. Yet another variant appears in Diodorus Siculus regarding the seven sons of Rhodos and the god Helios: Tenagas the

106 Plato *Republic*: noun *oikistês* twice at 2.379a1, once at 7.519c6; nearly 20 uses of *oikizô* with reference to the city under discussion including 3.403b4, 4.427b7, 5.456d5, 5.470e3, 8.558b2; also variants, for example, 4.433a2. For *oikizô* elsewhere: purified souls returning to earth, Plato *Phaedo* 114c2; move to a new house, Euripides *Iphigenia at Aulis* 670; fate's humbling a person, that is, moving that person to new lower status, Euripides *Heracleidae* 613.

107 Pindar *Olympian Ode* 7.78; for word in Plato, see *Lysis* 205d2.

108 "Opposition," McGlew (1993, 17). Plato: Socrates' staying home common knowledge, *Phaedrus* 230c5–e1; appealed to by personified laws, *Crito* 52b. For Socratic chauvinism about Athens, see *Theaetetus* 143d1–5. Within the *Republic*, Cephalus said in welcome that Socrates did not even walk to the Piraeus often, 1.328c5–6.

109 McGlew (1993, 20).

110 McGlew (1993, 158–161) surveys examples of the phenomenon; the subject is explored in Dougherty (1998).

most talented of the seven was envied by his brothers, who killed him and then fled and founded a number of new cities.[111]

The tyrant, conceived without explanatory back-story, brings justice into the city, but so forcibly as to dissolve any old reference to justice or its institutions. He appears out of nowhere as if without what we know as family. The founder begins in a family and violates it, then brings his repellent guilt to new territory and creates a society there.

In Plato's writings the establishment of a new order is even depicted as a planned punishment for violation of the old, not just for family killing. The *Laws* says that a sagacious leader will expel restive citizens, performing this purification as a *pharmakon* "drug" made necessary by the political *nosos* "infestation." Call their departure a colonization; let them go elsewhere to live rather than continue to infect their home city.[112]

This expanded understanding of the city founder as expelled pollutant also has antecedents outside of Plato, in which founders were family murderers of a metaphorical type, that is, causes of civil unrest.[113] The Ionian people of Phokaia escaped the tyrant Harpagos by leaving their homeland to found another home. Sparta's colony Taras/Tarentum was founded by its Partheniai. Whoever the Partheniai were, Aristotle says that the Spartans discovered them *epibouleusontas* "conspiring" and sent them to establish Taras.[114]

No tradition even slanderous had cast Socrates as murderer, nor for that matter Glaucon or Adeimantus (who by the literal logic of foundation would have had to murder their little brother Plato to qualify as city founders). But if metaphorical family-murder counts, fomenting civil unrest, the charge that Socrates corrupted the youth of Athens suffices. In a telling symbolism, Aristophanes' *Clouds* pictures a young man studying in the Socratic school and then coming home to beat his parents.[115] The pernicious effect of Socratic ideas comes to fruition in violence against parents. Socrates as founder of a new order would have meant that the jury convicted him rightly.

111 On Tlepolemus see Homer *Iliad* 2.661–671, and Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 4.58.7–8; on Alcmaeon, Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* 2.102.5–6; on Telegonus, Hyginus *Fabulae* 127 with Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.45; on Leucippus son of Xanthius, Parthenius *Erotica Pathemata* 5; on Koroibos, Pausanias *Description of Greece* 1.43.7–8; on Archias, Plutarch *Amatoriae narrationes*/*Love Stories* 2 (=*Moralia* 772e–773b); on the sons of Helios, Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 5.57.2.

112 Plato *Laws* 5.735d–736a.

113 The examples to come, like many of the founder/murderer examples, are found in Dougherty (1998).

114 On Phokaian founders see Herodotus *Histories* 1.164.1–3; on their identity, Strabo *Geography* 6.3.3; on their conspiracy, Aristotle *Politics* 5.1306b30–32.

115 Aristophanes *Clouds* 1321–1451; for Socrates' acknowledgment of his portrayal in *Clouds* as source for people's idea of him see Plato *Apology* 19c.

The point goes beyond a vindication of Socrates. For philosophers to go and found a city they must cast themselves as sources of strife within a city and infestations in the body politic. To speak of going elsewhere is to announce philosophy's error. Reform of the city by contrast implies the right of philosophy to inform the city of its injustice. Philosophers do not just disagree with other citizens but disagree because all those citizens are wrong. To leave as founder is to surrender the moral high ground, although staying might mean staying as a tyrant, the high ground then no better than a barricaded citadel.

Plato acknowledges, not always willingly, that the cost of staying for a takeover incurs the risk of resembling a tyrant. The energy that the *Republic* expends in depicting tyranny as psychological worst case, and as political antipodes to the new city, reflects the repression of the fear that the philosophical argument is itself producing tyranny.

One peculiar aside from Socrates alludes to the choice between founder and tyrant and the risk involved. In Book 5 he prepares to itemize the bad constitutions, but the others present plead with him to say more about the one good kind. What did he mean regarding women and children? Bring this city into existence.[116]

Socrates demurs. Glaucon insists. He promises Socrates a good audience: They're all friends and they'll listen to him in friendly spirit. But Socrates tells him that that only makes things worse. And here is the peculiar aside or *non sequitur*. "It is a lesser wrong to commit involuntary homicide than to deceive regarding fine, good, and just laws," especially to deceive one's friends.[117]

Where did the homicide come from? One could get expelled for that crime, as founders did; tyrants by contrast, deceived others about justice and goodness. For me to elaborate on this new better city (Socrates is saying) is to risk tyranny, as I would not risk if I involuntarily killed someone and had to go start a city elsewhere.

Plato does not secretly consider the *Republic*'s good city a tyranny. He neither wants a tyranny in Athens nor warns that his dialogue really describes one. In the world that preoccupies Plato, the good city will differ from a tyrannical regime as extremely as the philosophical soul differs from a tyrannical soul. But the *Republic*'s argument began with the analogy between souls and cities precisely because justice in the soul and its opposite are so hard to see. Without the soul to mark the difference between philosopher and tyrant all we have is the city. To scratch out institutions and overwrite them, the philosopher needs the will to establish *dikê* "justice" and the spontaneous luck that brings that will into a position of power. But in the world that Plato occupies,

116 Plato *Republic* 5.449a–450a.
117 Plato *Republic* 5.450d–451a.

the spontaneous arrival of a force to establish justice already exists as a concept, in the form of the tyrant. The word for reform is still the old word *tuchê*; and you can't rewrite "chance" into "guaranteed good fortune" without its ceasing to be chance.

"Be careful what you wish for," the proverb says. To the *Republic*'s participants the warning might go "Be careful what you are overheard praying for." According to Christian legend one forbore praying to Saint Jude because his name, being the same as that of Judas, might make one seem to be calling on the great traitor's soul in hell. One only ran that risk in desperate cases; thus Jude became the patron saint of lost causes. In a classical Greek city, and maybe not only there, you might pray for the divine intercession that put a philosopher on the throne, but fear that the words to summon such a kind would also fit and conjure up the person you'd never want in power. Far from permitting some exception to tyranny, these prayers would only hasten the process that made tyranny the rule.

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# 4 The news of the new city

Of all the incursions that others' voices make into the *Republic*, the boldest may be the bit of Homer that Socrates performs in Book 3. Homer so widely loved – even loved by Socrates, as he says in Book 10 – stands at the head of the tradition of tragedy that the *Republic* condemns more than any other poetry. Homer that great authority, who never (for instance) brought wise laws to a city as Athens' own Solon did, or Lycurgus and Charondas the corresponding lawgivers elsewhere: Why let him speak in the good city to come?[1]

Books 2 and 3 cite line after line from Homer, Aeschylus, and other poets that will *not* be heard in the city, or not by young members of its guardian class. And when the *Republic* concludes its final attack on poetry with an almost conciliatory gesture – poetry casts fearsome spells, so might have uses in a well-run city – even that surprising concession allows for poetry's reentry only on philosophy's terms. Not the poets themselves but poetry-lovers will have to argue on poetry's behalf, in words without verse.[2] Philosophers may speak to one another about poetry's merits, but not poets against philosophers.

The verb *kêleô* "charm, bewitch, cast a spell" occurs twice in this short passage. Socrates recognizes the magical effect of metered verse and can imagine a good city's harnessing that power for its own superior purposes.[3]

Socrates' words about the fond awe that Homer inspires in him contribute to the judgment, famous since the ancient critic pseudo-Longinus, that Plato drew Homerically from Homer as poets generally do from their rivals.[4] But

1 Plato *Republic* Book 10: Socrates' "affection and reverence" toward Homer, 595b; Homer "first teacher and leader" of tragedians, 595c1–2; contrast between Homer and lawgivers, 599d–e.

2 Plato *Republic* Book 10: poetry could be pleasurable and beneficial, 607e1–2; advocacy for poetry, 607c–d; that advocacy in *aneu metrou logon* "speech without meter," 607d7.

3 Plato *Republic*: verb *kêleô*, 10.607c7, 9; *kêlêsis* "charm" of poetry, 10.601b5; one likewise bewitched by music, 3.411b; same verb to same effect at Plato *Laws*, 8.840c1–3; Socrates calls mimetic poet *goês* "magician," *Republic* 10.598d3; also see 2.381e9–10. For greater emphasis on the negative implications of all these terms, see Halliwell (1988, 120 and 156). Despite the pleasures in poetic enchantment Halliwell sees the argument always returning to "the lurking sense of something insidious" (Halliwell 1988, 156).

4 "Longinus" *On the Sublime* 13.3. For a modern reading of Plato and Homeric materials see Segal (1978).

when Socrates offers his own Homeric performance he communicates the gist of epic while denying that he is a poet.[5] In this passage at least philosophy rivals poetry using the conversational prose philosophy calls its own.

## Homer in the city

The setting for this performance is the guardians' education. Even given the natural qualities that the city's soldiers and rulers possess, they will need to undergo a monitored acculturation. Socrates mainly describes the poetry these young people may and must not hear, first with censorship of the stories Greek culture told about gods and heroes, then a formal criticism. The young recruits who will grow up to defend the city need stories that strengthen their fighting spirit together with their self-control, not laments or outbursts from heroes, still less the wild gossip Greek children were told about gods who squabble, change their shape and lie, lose their heads to lust, and torment mortals without improving them.[6]

The edits that Socrates proposes will tear holes in epic and tragedy but seem to leave the outline intact of what classical Greece considered ancient history, which is to say the stories surrounding the Trojan War and its aftermath and the end of the heroic age.

Poetic propriety turns out only to have started the discussion. The formal criticism assesses the *mimêsis* "imitation, representation, enactment" with which much poetry works its magic. According to this analysis poetic *diêgêsis* "narration" takes two forms: simple *diêgêsis* and *mimêsis*.[7] This way of subdividing a genus, so that the *haplos* "plain, pure" appearance of the genus constitutes one species, guarantees the deviancy or irregularity of the other; as if I defined donkeys by saying there are two kinds of horse, the true horse and the donkey; or as if I distinguished two ways of walking, plain walking and skipping. This is definition by insult.

As happens with deviancy, the type that is *mimêsis* comes in degrees. Some poets mimic a little, some a lot. Poets who narrate, speaking in their own voice, put themselves before an audience and make assertions. Dramatists write only the words said by their plays' characters, so that they might debate an issue (as the *Laws* points out in its own comment on *mimêsis*) without saying anything or even without knowing "whether these or the others among the things said are true."[8]

5 Plato *Republic* 3.383d7–8.

6 Plato *Republic*: soldiers to be brave yet self-controlled, 2.375c; no laments, 3.386a–388d; no outbursts, 3.391a–c; no god squabbles, 2.378b–d; no shape-shifting gods, 2.380d–381e; no gods' lies, 2.382a–383a; no gods' lusts, 3.390b–c; no purposeless suffering caused by gods, 2.379b–380b.

7 Plato *Republic* 3.392d.

8 Plato: types of poets, *Republic* 3.392c–393c; dramatists, *Laws* 4.719c–d.

Epic poetry mixes narration with characters' speeches. Aristotle, sounding anti-Platonically impish, will commend Homer for quoting his characters as much as he does instead of recounting actions. But the impishness is Plato's. He sees what gives Homeric epics their unflagging appeal and what puts spectators in the theater's seats, and he makes exactly that the trait to condemn. The poets are hiding. They speak as if someone else were talking, which amounts to saying that they're lying.[9]

The analysis of *mimêsis* paves the way for a thorough housecleaning. Deleting this or that antisocial sentiment is fine, but when *mimêsis* goes the city will have no more drama in it, however ethically it might depict gods and heroes. So the lone expression of uncertainty in this passage stands out. Maybe the phenomenon includes more than staged drama.[10] The softened language seems to hold back from banning Homer along with drama.

In the spirit of the taxonomy of narrative methods that simultaneously defined and denigrated *mimêsis*, Socrates takes up the *Iliad* to show what *mimêsis* is in epic verse, also to look ahead to what will remain of Homer in the guardians' education after the city has scrubbed his poems clean. He asks Adeimantus whether he knows the first part of the *Iliad*.[11]

*Everyone* knew the first part of the *Iliad*. Athenian children learned to read with Homer, presumably starting at the beginning and hearing each syllable sounded out and copying the letters.[12] The Athenian Stranger in Plato's *Laws* complains about the disproportionate place of poetry in elementary education. Children should learn to read using (for instance) the conversation the Stranger has led up to that point – roughly the first half of the *Laws*[13] – not the epics that were both the oldest compositions the classical Greeks knew of and records of the earliest events they considered historical. Children beginning to read probably scratched the word *mênin* "wrath, vengeful temper" into the smooth wax in their tablets before any other, because the *Iliad* begins there, with the fury that took Achilles out of the Trojan War's fighting, thus nearly preserving him, before his greater anger against Hector returned him to the battlefield and ensured his early death, and (together with all the other heroes' deaths) left Greece deprived of leaders. The archaic and subsequent

9 Aristotle commends Homer, *Poetics* 24 1460a5–11. Plato *Republic* Book 3: in imitation a poet *apokruptoito* "would hide, remain concealed," 393c10–11; poet imitating speaks *hôs tis allos ôn* "as if he were someone else," or becoming the character, 393c1, 393d5.

10 Adeimantus completing Socrates' thought says that criticizing *mimêsis* is a matter of banning comedy and tragedy. "Maybe [*isôs*]," says Socrates, "but maybe [*isôs*] more than that": Plato *Republic* 3.394d.

11 Plato *Republic* Book 3: *Iliad* illustrates *mimêsis*, 392e–393b; "Do you know the first things?" 392e2–3.

12 For references to *grammata* "letters" as paradigmatic of early education and knowledge (though without any clue of how reading was taught), see Plato *Alcibiades I* 106e, 107a1, 113a2, 114c1–2, 118c.

13 Plato *Laws* Book 7: poetry in education, 810e–811a; to be replaced with *Laws* and such writings, 811c–e.

ages understood the long unimpressive time between the Trojan War and their time as the outcome of that war. Reading begins where history does, somewhat as it did for children in early modern New England whose abecedary started the alphabet "In Adam's fall we sinnèd all."[14]

Homer was not only read in antiquity. An Athenian would have heard sections from his epics performed. And for some time after the composition of the epics and the distribution of their texts, they could not have been read at all. Moderns should remain aware that Plato's dialogues appeared as part of a transition out of oral culture toward one in which many people not only could read but did.[15] And yet by Plato's time knowledge of the past had come to be equated with a written record. Thucydides writing before Plato presents his account of the Peloponnesian War as a composed work, contrasts it with stories that are *akouein* "heard" for a moment, indeed offers it as a possession *aiei* "forever" – eternal because inscribed. Before him Herodotus had prefaced *his* history with the statement of its purpose, that events not be forgotten.[16] Plato's *Timaeus* contains a paraphrase of that preface, together with other Herodotean images that defer to reliable written records. For both Plato and Herodotus the Egyptians prevail as authorities about history because they can read about it.[17]

The *Laws* provides for a wholly new city. In the *Republic*'s merely newly remade old city the old readings will still be available, only redone. Or so it seems. The narrative that Socrates now takes over from Homer anticipates the poetry that the new city will find acceptable. (Even though this context limits the critique of poetry to what the young will hear, Socrates concludes his arguments against *mimêsis* with an image of the mimetic poet's expulsion from the city altogether. The argument exceeds its educational context.[18]) He delivers a limp summary of the very early scene from the *Iliad* in which Chryses pleads with Agamemnon to release his daughter, the other Achaeans approve of the request, but Agamemnon sends the poet away angrily. The old

14 The 1777 version of that abecedary is known as *New England Primer: Improved for the More Easy Attaining the True Reading of English.*

15 For a sample of the wide-ranging and consequential discussion of Platonic writing and oral culture, see Havelock (1963) and Ong (1991, 167–168). Among recent reappraisals see Gibson (2016).

16 Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* 1.22.4; Herodotus *Histories* 1.0.

17 Echoes of Herodotus in Plato's *Timaeus* include a trip to Egypt in which the visiting Greek is disabused of parochial beliefs about history (*Histories* 2.142–144; *Timaeus* 22b–23c) and informed about significant movements of the sun (*Histories* 2.142.4; *Timaeus* 22c–d). The *Timaeus* includes a sentence speaking, as the *Histories*' opening does, of *erga* "deeds" that are *megala kai thaumasta* "great and wondrous": *Timaeus* 20e. Writing for preserving past records, *Timaeus* 23a–c. On Plato and the prologue to Herodotus see Węcowski (2004, 146n22).

18 Plato *Republic* 3.398a–b. Socrates says "we" will tell the itinerant mimetic poet "there is no such man among us in the city." This expulsion clearly exceeds a pedagogical restriction.

man leaves frightened and prays to Apollo to avenge his tears. "Narration without imitation takes place like this [*houtôs*]."[19]

Adeimantus says he understands the example, and Socrates' loose word *houtôs* "like this; along these lines" gestures ahead as if he too could now go through Homer and sum him up likewise. The same substitution of narrative for characters' words should be possible for the *Iliad* as a whole. It's done *like this*, Socrates says, as if he had stopped arbitrarily.

Reading on in the *Iliad* suggests something different, that Socrates had to stop where he did. Apollo heeds the prayer of Chryses and unleashes a contagion on the Achaean camp. Mules and dogs die, then troops. Agamemnon is told to return the old priest's daughter to end the pestilence. Although he does, he demands as compensation the captive girl Achilles had taken. Achilles sulks and the invaders' effort stalls, and all the rest happens.[20] Apollo's response to Chryses with the battle camp infestations sets the rest of history in motion.

Socrates stops himself in other words just before saying that a god purposely harms human beings. The pestilence does not punish the guilty, because Agamemnon is the guilty one and he is spared; it does not improve those that it strikes, for the other Achaeans had already wanted Chryseis to be returned to her father. Apollo harms innocent people, as the discussion had agreed a poet must never say.[21]

Whether in mimetic verse or in the same flat summation, the story can't go on. And no infestation, no quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon; no quarrel, no *Iliad*. The *Republic*'s strictures disallow any sequel to the narrative fragment that Socrates gives. As Nabokov said in another connection, we are on the portico and then realize there is no house.

Judged as interplay between Homer and Plato the performance shows how philosophical writing neutralizes the mystifying charm of epic. First as nonpoet Socrates unmeters the *Iliad*; then as opponent of *mimêsis* he denies the poem its engaging dramatic narrations; and even in denatured form he lops almost all of it off, so that the *Iliad* becomes an anecdote. That ends the tradition. Epic contains many anecdotes, but an anecdote can't be epic.

As a look ahead into life among the new city's people the recitation invites more questions. When Socrates complains about poets who make the divine

19 Chryses and Agamemnon, Homer *Iliad* 1.12–42; narrative summary, Plato *Republic* 3.393e–394a; "Narration," etc., 3.394a8–b1.

20 Homer *Iliad*: Apollo heeds prayer, etc., 1.43–52; Agamemnon returns Chryseis, 1.115; demands Briseis instead, 1.184; Achilles begins to sulk, 1.245.

21 Plato *Republic* 2.380b. In a parallel self-silencing, see Plato *Critias* 121c, which reports an interrupted speech by Zeus. The *Critias*, Plato's lone unfinished dialogue, stops when Zeus is about to speak. According to the cycle of poems that constituted the Trojan War cycle, everything about that war and its aftermath began with a proclamation by Zeus (preceding even the marriage of Peleus): *Cypria* fragment 1 = Proclus *Chrestomathia* 1. So the *Critias* comes to the verge of turning into epic poetry and then ends itself. I share the judgment of Capra (2010, 214) that Plato could not continue without producing another epic, and therefore broke off the dialogue.

imposition of pain anything other than just punishment, he says that no one should either hear or say such things in a well-governed city. Adeimantus answers, "I vote for this law [*nomou*] along with you. I like it." So this would be "one of the laws [*nomôn*] and examples [*tupôn*] concerning the gods," Socrates says. Book 2 closes with Adeimantus's endorsing these "laws" again.[22] Socrates' synopsis of the *Iliad* episode has activated the institutions of the new city so that the recitation exists in two worlds at once, as an example for Adeimantus and through him for Plato's reader to tell narration from *mimêsis*; and as a foretaste of the *Iliad*'s place in the future city.

Within the argument the *Republic* maintains control. The Homeric excerpt does not release a subversive under-argument that makes the dominant argument stumble. As the exemplification of Homeric verse in the coming city the new *Iliad* will no longer begin the story of Greek wars and Greek cities. When they hear no more than a paragraph about Chryses and Agamemnon, the guardians will scarcely know that their city has a history, let alone what that history was. No one in the city will know that the just regime was established in and against the resistance of an unjust world.

(We recall that the oldest surviving biographical information about Plato is the rumor that Apollo fathered him. The devotee of Apollo failing to persuade the great king amounts to an anecdote that doubts whether kings and philosophers ever do work together.[23] This is what the city will hear from Homer.)

The city will live. But if the *Republic* brings its readers to wonder how one lives without much of what we call "literature," our modern indifference to Homer historian often gets in the way of our wondering what history the new city's people will know. And then within the larger history that stretches back to the gods and heroes we may want to wonder whether any tale within the city shows the circumstances under which the city arose, let alone the acts that brought its new polity into existence.

## News of the world

I put the Homeric extract into a second group of external voices represented within the *Republic.* Chapter 3 focused on the authors that Socrates' interlocutors cite and use; those appeals to *what others have said* raise worries about nonphilosophers' mistaking the new city for an old kind of tyranny.

22 Plato *Republic* Book 2: Adeimantus "voting" for the law, 380c4–5; Socrates calling it a law for the city, 380c7–9; Book 2 closes, 383c6–7. These examples appear with many other indications of how the *Republic*'s participants establish the laws of the future city, in Lane (2013, 105).

23 Plato's nephew Speusippus, along with other sources Clearchus and Anaxilaides, report an obscure story that implies Apollo's fatherhood: Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 3.2. The attempt to win over an irritable king also calls to mind the adventures Plato allegedly had in Syracuse, trying vainly to make Dionysius a philosopher.

That is fitting, for the *Republic*'s interlocutors are the audience to which Socrates brings his new city.

But together with the Homeric excerpt, the *Republic*'s noble lie and, to different purpose, the allegory of the ship of state bring in stories and words from other authors thanks to Socrates' own efforts. The Homeric fragment and the lie assume an audience inside the future city. Homer and Hesiod, who supply the materials out of which Socrates generates these passages, speak to the good city's origins and the nature of the human world in which the city originates. And because Socrates casts himself as lawgiver, founder, or reformer within the *Republic*'s city, his stories lend themselves to being imagined as stories told to the new city's people.

The variety of skepticism or confusion that Chapter 3 described does not come up when picturing what one will say inside the city. It's not as though the citizens will doubt that their city exists, or experience it as tyrannical. But even so we might ask whether the city's people will know how their city came to be; and if they do not learn such a thing it begins to seem possible that they fail to know their city. Can a good state come about yet fail to understand itself as one?

Rachana Kamtekar digs into the question of citizens' consent for the Platonic city. The productive class in particular will not only have to accept and even prefer rule by the guardians. They ought to prefer that rule for the right reasons, not for instance because the guardians leave their money-making alone and take on military risks. *That* consent would derive from money-love and cowardice, which are far from the character traits that a just regime depends on and ought to foster.[24] As Kamtekar poses the question, the *Republic*'s proposal risks generating a state whose citizen would not see that state as just, or might acknowledge the state's goodness but consent to its rule on other grounds.

Kamtekar's question keeps one focused on the citizens' characters in the city. Although I believe that the present chapter leads, as her inquiry does, to the matter of what the citizens know about their city, and how they know it and by what means, I keep the founding moment of the city in mind. And while acknowledging the value of the question why the citizens consent to being governed, I move toward their comprehension of the state that rules them by asking what they can know about its origin. The philosophers who govern so that the city might be good when unphilosophical cities fail also institute the new order, so that in the landscape of cities the good one might exist.

Logically speaking a citizen might consent to the state's authority without considering how that state began. In states as they exist, their origin is treated as crucial to their citizens' loyalty. To judge by the way modern nations pay

24 Kamtekar (2004, 147). A contrary position, that the productive class will appreciate any city with *laissez-faire* economics, may be found in Reeve (1988, 204). I discuss consent in connection with the treatment of naked women in the *Republic*'s city in Pappas (2015).

tribute to their origins – days of independence or liberation; anniversary years of their founding – the state's creation is taken to inspire loyalty by latter-day citizens grateful for the founders' act of establishment. If these looks back at the political origin do help to generate consent, the inhabitants of the Platonic city might also value their city in recognition of its moment of creation – assuming of course they are in a position to recognize it. Will the city see its ongoing self as continuous with the philosophizing act in the *Republic* that inspired it?

## History in the city

The *Republic* says a lot about the city's place in future history and a little about consciousness of that future history within the city. If the *Republic* mimics conversational drift, as Plato's dialogues do (digressions, sudden objections), it abandons that pretense of a normal chat where the varieties of inferior soul and constitution are concerned, and the historical processes that send a good city downward through every worse change. Through pages of digressions (the sum of Books 5, 6, and 7) Socrates keeps his focus on the city's decline, and returns to it despite all distractions.[25] No other topic forces its way into the argument like that.

The people in the city will not learn of the worse varieties or of the economic and political forces that bring worse constitutions about. They do know that cities deteriorate. Socrates proposes an invented oracle for citizens to learn as true doctrine, that the city will fall if a bronze or iron ruler ever holds power. It is a quick look at an unwelcome future, but substantively consistent with the long decline of Book 8, for on both accounts injustice arises when the lowest part of the soul controls the soul or the productive third class rules the city.[26] Some historical reasoning will be taught to the new city's people.

On the other hand, Socrates presents the decline of the best constitution as inevitable when speaking outside the city. "For everything that comes to be, there is a destruction." The putative oracular pronouncement names decline as a danger to be guarded against, as if the city might never take on injustice if it keeps the wrong people from ruling. And some customs and observances are to be established as permanent, for instance the cultic worship of those who die in battle with special glory. "We will care for their graves for all remaining

25 Plato *Republic*: Socrates proposes itemizing inferior souls and cities, 5.449a–b; interlocutors make him describe the city, 5.449d–450c; to digress to show why philosophical governance makes the city possible, 5.474ff; tangent to what philosophers know, 6.506b–7.541b; insistent return to *palin tên autên iômen* "go the same way," 8.543c.

26 Plato *Republic* 3.415c. For all the detail in Book 8, the false oracle to be told in the city and the putative true history that Socrates tells his interlocutors both identify the *place* of decline in the ruling class (see 8.545d), and the *cause* of decline as the appearance of an inferior among rulers (8.546d).

time [*ton loipon … chronon*]," Socrates says, now speaking from within the city and as if the time within the new order does not end.[27]

Tributes to the glorious war dead invite curiosity about the city's relationship to its past. Plato depicts Socrates inverting memorialization of the dead in the courtroom, proposing that Athens feed him in the Prytaneum as one worthier of that privilege than Olympic winners.[28] Naturally he is being disrespectful, but he disrespects Athens for honoring the wrong people, not the act of honoring. If the guardians receive posthumous treatment comparable to how one treats divine powers, you might expect the city to look back even more reverently at those first rulers who brought it into existence.[29]

The opposite seems to be the case. We find ourselves picturing a city that occludes inquiries into the moment of its origin. The chopped and impossible digest of the *Iliad*'s first scene hinted that the city will not have the usual sources of historical information available to it. Other outside materials that Socrates incorporates into his political presentation take the worry from the absence of historical information for the new city's occupants to information about the absence of history. Whatever the people in the city will see when they look back, it will not be the creation of the political order they benefit from.

## The noble lie

When it comes to the noble lie the circumstances of its being told within the city do not need to be guessed at or inferred. Socrates presents it in argument as a tale to tell the first citizens as if it were true. There is no way to get *them* to believe it, but their children and later generations might. This story consciously repurposes existing material, and not merely to make a compelling image but in order to persuade and motivate its audience.

Socrates proposes the lie so directly that he has to admit his embarrassment, and readers commonly think he should be embarrassed. "I don't know with what nerve," he confesses,

> or using which words, I will attempt to persuade first the rulers themselves and the soldiers, and then the rest of the city, that when we were feeding and teaching them, these things seemed to be happening to them

27 Plato *Republic*: "For everything that comes to be," 8.546a2; cultic worship for some soldiers, 5.468e4–469b3; care for graves, 5.469a. That *ton loipon chronon* means *all* time to come is implied by the uses of that phrase to mean permanence at *Phaedo* 81a8, *Meno* 81c1–2. The *Meno* uses the words as a quote from Pindar (=fragment 133), where permanence is meant. If not signifying that the city will exist forever, the injunction to memorialize its best guardians suggests that the citizens will be spoken to with the assumption that it will.

28 Plato *Apology* 36d7. On the nature of the mockery involved, see Harris (2010).

29 When Socrates speaks of tributes to those who die gloriously in battle he has not yet identified the kings as philosophers; that comes later, at 5.473c–d.

> like dreams [*hôsper oneirata*], because in truth they were down in the earth being shaped and nourished.[30]

It's far-fetched. Socrates introduces the tale as a *mêchanê* "contrivance" of lies by which to generate the people's allegiance to the new city. Soon he wonders whether Glaucon knows of any *mêchanê* by which to get the city's people to believe it. They'll need a further device or mechanism to make the device or mechanism work – what Nikos Charalabopoulos calls "the paradox of the contrivance for a contrivance."[31]

Quite possibly just because the lie will strike citizens as unbelievable Socrates concocts it out of familiar ingredients. He calls the story nothing *kainon* "novel, innovative," thus incidentally distinguishing it from the *kainon* torch race he heard about in Book 1. But then that torch race celebrated the arrival of new religious practice in Athens, the admission of the Thracian goddess Bendis into the local pantheon. The Athenians brought *daimonia kaina* "new gods" into the city, as they would later sanctimoniously accuse Socrates of doing, and organized a new kind of horse race to mark the occasion.[32] By contrast Socrates will sway this group of young people without a suspicion of new gods.

Rather than novel the lie is "Phoenician," and it tells of things that supposedly did once take place, though they don't occur *ep'hêmôn* "here, now, among us."[33] As far as the lie's claim of birth-from-earth goes, Socrates' adaptation consists in the first place of taking a story told about the unreachable past and bringing it into that near-future occasion when (with luck) he and his associates will have gathered and trained the new city's people. Assuming these Athenian philosophers can train the cadre of guardians, they will have to lie as myths never did; for even pious people who trusted the myths they heard treated them as occurrences from another era. A Greek in antiquity might have spoken of the unhappy marriage between Hephaestus and Aphrodite, but could not have made sense of the news that Hephaestus was getting remarried.[34]

30 Plato *Republic* 3.414d.

31 Plato *Republic* Book 3: the lie a contrivance, 414b7; does Glaucon know devices, 415c8–9. Although *mêchanê* does not have to connote a technological device, it often did refer to such things, like the stagecraft that brought gods into a play's action by *deus ex machina.* For *mêchanê* in connection with tragic technology see Plato *Cratylus* 425d. "Contrivance for a contrivance" Charalabopoulos (2013, 323).

32 Plato, *kainos* "new, fresh, novel": torch race, *Republic* 1.328a; Socrates accused of recognizing *kaina* divinities, *Apology* 24c1, 26b6. The Athenians seem to have added Bendis to their local pantheon for cynical motives, given the care they gave to Thrace as a strategic ally: Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* 2.27.1. Besides strategic location, Thrace had timber that Athens needed for its imperialist navy (Garland 1992, 112–114). On Bendis versus the myth of Er, see Segal (1978, 324).

33 Plato *Republic* 3.414c.

34 Veyne (1988, 18).

I locate the audience for the lie in fifth-century Athens although others understand what Socrates proposes as a tale told to every generation in the new city. They confront the noble lie as a civic religion that the city's rulers will impress upon every young generation as the truth about that very generation. "You were born from the earth," every young person will be told.[35] The dialogue's talk of the city and its people has been vague, up to this point, in one respect: Socrates can seem to be describing what the city will do as a rule, and in perpetuity, as for example in its educational practices; but also sometimes seems to have the first generation in mind, and how he and his coworkers will mold these young people into able citizens. For this reason the context can support either a picture of the lie's perpetual promulgation as each generation comes of age, or a single occurrence to accompany the city's inauguration. The opposed readings of the lie's retelling would not exist otherwise.[36]

A story told again and again for generations, to those generations and about them, sounds more like a religious ritual. I consider this the great strength of the rival reading. Plato's dialogues frequently compare experiences of important learning to the revelations imparted during the Eleusinian mysteries.[37] The fasting, the mystifying darkness of the cave at Eleusis, and the probably psychedelic properties of the participants' drink, combined to give the secret doctrine more weight than it otherwise might have had. When Socrates asks whether Glaucon knows any method for making people believe the lie, he might even be referring coyly to these aspects of the cult, not wanting to identify them lest he seem to be accusing the priests at Eleusis of engineering belief. We envision a religious apparatus devoted to manufacturing patriotism.

One sign that Socrates has a single audience of the lie in mind, that initial generation of citizens, is his use of the singular first person. He doesn't know *poiois logois chrômenos erô* "using which words I will speak" when telling the story; "I will attempt [*epicheirêsô*] to persuade" the rulers and others.[38] What "we" do – the governing class as a whole – might be a figure of speech for what every group of teachers does and will continue doing through the centuries ahead. "We start with grammar," etc. What Socrates says *he* will do does not extend through future generations in the same way.

35 Thus Jonathan Lear's eye-opening approach to the lie (and to other storytelling within the *Republic*) presumes that every young person is told: "You dreamt your childhood" (Lear 2006, 32–34). McCoy (2020, Chapter 6) expects adults to stop believing in the tale once they have had their own children, and finds the merits of the myth in just this willingness to let itself be questioned. Malcolm Schofield appears to read the lie as I do, as a tale told to all generations about the first generation (Schofield 2006, 287–288).

36 In fall 2017, in a seminar at the CUNY Graduate Center, Callum MacRae spent some time discussing this question with me and convinced me of the reading I defend here.

37 Farrell (1999).

38 Plato *Republic* Book 3: "using which words," 414d1–2; "I will attempt to persuade," 414d2.

There is also Glaucon's hope that later generations will find the lie easier to swallow than those who first hear it do. This hope really makes sense if the lie is told a single time to those it is about, then repeated as a story about ancestors. The first generation tries and very possibly fails to believe that they came out of the earth, and then in dutiful good faith tells their children "Your parents came out of the earth." After a century the miraculous birth becomes something that happened in the olden days. Instead of requiring that later people become more gullible about where babies come from, this look to the future merely recognizes that stories about the past are easier to believe.

Even when proposing the tale of the birth to a single cohort, the founders will lie on a majestic scale. (Accordingly G. R. F. Ferrari speaks of the *gennaion pseudos* as "grand lie" rather than "noble lie," comparing his use of the word to the "grand" in "grand larceny."[39]) The scale of prevarication involved is one reason for calling the story "Phoenician," given the long association between Phoenicians and deception.[40] But this cynical side of the story seems to matter less than the respectability that the Phoenician pedigree might confer. The Greeks recognized the Phoenicians as an older people, the source of their alphabet.[41] And a similar tale was told in Thebes, which claimed to have been founded by Cadmus the Phoenician. Cadmus arrived at the land that would be Thebes, killed a dragon, and sowed its teeth; the *Spartoi* "sown men" sprang up from the soil dressed and armed for battle.[42] For this reason Plato's Athenian Stranger will call an autochthony story "Sidonian," referring to a Phoenician city.[43]

Athens had its own autochthony story, according to which Athena was foster mother and first protector to the Athenians. Other dialogues cite versions of that myth approvingly.[44] But the noble lie includes something found in the Phoenician–Theban story and not in the Athenian version: The people's *hopla* "arms, armor," also broadly speaking "tools," were being produced underground during the citizens' long gestation.

On the standard hometown story, the first king comes out of the earth an infant and Athena incubates him in a basket.[45] By the time he can move and speak he resembles any other infant. Athena, force for acculturation, cooperates with the earth (source of the child's natural characteristics) to make

39 Ferrari (2000, 107n63).

40 Odysseus on "a Phoenician man who knew how to lie," Homer *Odyssey* 14.288; Strabo will say *pseusma phoinikikon* "Phoenician lie" as if the phrase were proverbial, *Geography* 3.5.5.

41 Herodotus *Histories* 5.58.1–2.

42 Although the full story only survives in later authors, Cadmus is named from an early date, as in Herodotus's account of the alphabet. "Apollodorus" *Library* 3.4.1–2 tells the story, crediting elements to the pre-Socratic Pherecydes. Other versions appear in Hyginus *Fabulae* 178; Ovid *Metamorphoses* 3.1–137. Most significantly for the story's age, we find Palaephatus (a little after Aristotle) debunking the tale of earthborn men in *Peri Apistôn* 3.

43 Plato *Laws* 2.6643–4.

44 Plato, autochthony: *Critias* 109c–d; *Menexenus* 237e; *Timaeus* 23d–e.

45 "Apollodorus" *Library* 3.14.6.

the Athenians, now recognized as both natural and educated. The version in Plato's *Menexenus*, although purportedly Athenian, adapts autochthony so that it sounds closer to the Theban version and to the noble lie. Athena is absent; thus the earth provides both birth and education (and thus education is natural). The Athenians learn to make and use weapons and other implements,[46] so that we can picture them, as we picture the soldiers in the noble lie, emerging into the open air armed and trained to fight, as Cadmus found the first Thebans.

The appeal of the Theban tradition derives from its attributing birth and education to a single divine agent. Athenian autochthony separates training from origin. Earth is the natural mother, and as such the cause only of birth. Because Athena as nurse or foster mother supplies something distinct, education is not natural. For the earthborns in Thebes, and according to the *Menexenus* and the noble lie, education belongs in human life as being born and eating do. The city's founders may expect that the first generation will want to pass along everything they learned to their children with a particular fervor. They took this all in prenatally, and what nature taught has a special claim to being worth learning.[47]

Nicole Loraux observes aptly that the noble lie denies motherhood; I do not know that anyone made that point before her. But insofar as the Athenian father's task was pedagogical, the lie also denies fatherhood.[48] Whatever professions the newly emerged citizens practice, they were not trained for by the fathers who belong to the city before its reform.

Fatherhood begins before education. In Athens, Hephaestus played the fertilizing father after his semen fell on the earth, even if he does disappear from the story after that act. The other autochthony stories also have fertilizing fathers, even in Thebes. Cadmus sows the dragon teeth as if they were seeds, which is to say sperm; Deucalion sows rocks to the same effect in Arcadia. (Where Platonic references to autochthony in Athens mention Hephaestus, the genteel begetting retains a memory of its sexuality and resembles gardening.)[49] The noble lie stands out – again, together with the

46 Plato *Menexenus* 238b.

47 Mark Zelcer and I develop this point in Pappas and Zelcer (2015, 108, 162–166).

48 Loraux (2000, 84). Loraux's study takes the noble lie to be introduced as Theban *alternative* to the *Menexenus*'s Athenian original (64); but in removing Athena from the Athenian birth story, and in their unification of nature and education, the lie and the version in the *Menexenus* are in harmony. I harp on these harmonies because agreement between the noble lie and autochthony in the *Menexenus* makes these qualities of the lie seem like tendencies in Plato not accidents. Fatherhood as pedagogical: See Plato *Crito* 50d regarding a law that fathers must have their sons learn a *technê*, even speaking as if the law itself made them fathers to Socrates. That law had allegedly begun with Solon: Plutarch *Life of Solon* 22.1.

49 "Apollodorus" *Library* 1.7.2. The stones thrown by Deucalion produced men, Pyrrha's stones women; also Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1.313–347. For other Platonic mentions of autochthony see *Timaeus* 23e (and implicit mockery of Deucalion, 22a); *Critias* 109c–d. On the general metaphor of sowing for insemination see Pindar *Pythian Ode* 3.15; *Timaeus* 86c comments on the metaphor comparing a man heavy with *sperma* to a tree overburdened with fruit. By

*Menexenus*'s autochthony – in arranging a birth from the earth that is innocent of fathering acts.

Socrates does introduce a second formative power, in the next part of the story, whom he calls *ho theos* "the god." After having told of the new guardians' egalitarian birth by the earth, he adds surprisingly that the god, "forming [*plattôn*] those of you who are qualified to rule [*archein*], mixed [*sunemeixen*] gold into them," and other metals into other citizens. But this curious first cause of caste neither teaches the new people (the teaching having been accomplished in their dreams while they slept in their mother's womb) nor performs any act like insemination. His *forming* and *mixing* are words for a worker's labor, neither sexual fertilization nor sowing. Forming and mixing are acts associated with a father god in Genesis, rarely in Greek creation. *This* god has apparently joined the story as earth's assistant.[50]

Along with divine fathers the noble lie expunges the city's symbolic fathers, call them founders or reformers. Socrates (or any other philosopher–founder in the role he envisions for himself) will tell the city's people that they came into existence, and the new city too, with no contribution from the philosophers who gained kingly power or kings who philosophized.

Indeed the noble lie makes a textbook case of what Brian Seitz and Thomas Thorp analyze as "the withdrawal of the origin" in political thinking. Their "withdrawal" means that sometimes in mythic presentation, sometimes in argument, the founding of a society makes subsequent history possible yet does not belong in that history. The founding may disappear from view. "In order to do its work of standing for and reassuring subsequent moments in time the origin must withdraw from the process it would ground."[51] The noble lie does not move the city into a mythic era, as it would if every generation believed itself to be earthborn. Still an effect of the mythic remains, that no human being emerges as founding cause of the new order. As remembrances of a military victory or a national hero do, the noble lie gives citizens a start to history that stirs their loyalty. And by bringing all the first citizens into the air together, it gives that patriotism an egalitarian meaning as war stories and polarizing leaders might not be able to.[52]

an extension of the metaphor the woman became an *alox* "furrow," as in Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1210; cf. the frequently cited formula from Athenian marriage "I give you my daughter for the plowing [*arotôi*] of legitimate children," Menander fragment, 720; see discussion in Loraux (2000, 103). My remarks on autochthonous fathering have grown out of conversations with Sophia Friedman–Pappas.

50 "The god," Plato *Republic* 3.415a5. For the contrasting making see Genesis 2.7. Yet again the appearance of a divine assistant to the earth brings Plato's *Menexenus* to mind, although the helpers the earth summons at 238b are teachers, hence (despite their genders' remaining unspecified) closer to Athenian fathers.

51 Seitz and Thorp (2013, 11).

52 In this respect parting ways with the noble lie, the speech in Plato's *Menexenus* emphasizes the fraternity that results from autochthony, without mention of the class distinction that the lie goes on to justify. See Plato *Menexenus* 239a, 243e–244a.

Socrates draws on old stories of autochthony to cover his philosophizing work as reformer with an image of nature. He welcomes the myth, not as a cynic would, but beginning to believe it himself. Thus Plato's readers sometimes pause over Socrates' entering into the language of the lie after he and Glaucon have finished discussing it. "Let's arm these earthborns and lead them forward," he says as if having heard and accepted the story. The myth to be told in the city becomes "a story *about* the establishment of the city"; "the metallic men of the myth are transformed directly *into* the … community."[53] The shift attests to the power that this old story has even for the one telling it. Socrates embraces the earthy conception of the guardians he will have trained himself, as reassurance that he did no more with the city's new people than a benevolent nature would have done.

## Another noble lie

The story continues, but qualifies what it had started out teaching.[54] Thanks to that god who came in to finish earth's work, the city's first generation contains the ground's metals: gold in rulers, silver in soldiers, iron and bronze in farmers and skilled professionals. Their progeny will have the same metals in them, for the most part their parents' metals: Their class status will be a matter of discovery not human invention. Because people mostly breed true, the discovery in future generations will only sometimes affect a citizen's standing. The founders with their sharp eyes for souls will have sorted the classes correctly to begin with. (The myth of Er, as discussed in the next chapter, offers concrete examples of what the founders will see before them and how they will look for the right qualities among young citizens.) The founders' successors may just keep an eye out for anomalous young people better or worse than their status. The fictitious oracle enters here, that when someone bronze or iron governs, the city will be ruined.[55]

Besides the fact that metals occur in earth, Socrates can justify his transition to the second part of the story by appeal to what is Phoenician in another sense: preoccupied with profit. The stereotype appears in Homer and Plato's characters still believe it.[56] Socrates might expect those money-lovers to warm to a tale about valuable metals.

53 Plato *Republic* 3.415d6–8; "a story *about*," Ophir (1991, 96) (emphasis in original); "the metallic men" Van Noorden (2010, 181) (emphasis in original).

54 Malcolm Schofield's treatments of the noble lie take Plato to task for the deceptive implications of the lie. For example, Schofield shows that despite the twin messages, first equality as siblings and then differences as metals, the *Republic*'s subsequent argument invokes the story to justify hierarchy not fraternity. On this point see Schofield (2009, 105–106); but also Schofield (2007). Schofield (2006) contains sections that overlap with both those articles.

55 Plato *Republic* Book 3: the rest of the myth, 415a–c; metals according to class, 415a; metals breed true, 415a8–9; guardians alert to deviations, 415b–c.

56 Odysseus tells Eumaios what greedy Phoenicians did to him, Homer *Odyssey* 14.287–289; Eumaios attributes his enslavement to trinket-trading Phoenicians, 15.415–418. Socrates calls Phoenicians (along with Egyptians) money-lovers: Plato *Republic* 4.436a1–2; the

After all the citizens do not have spears or trowels implanted in them, as they might if their magical birth simply justified their vocations. The rulers contain gold because they're worth the most, and other citizens carry the makings of cheaper coins in them, down to the iron that the Spartans persisted in using for their money.[57] The joke is on the Phoenicians though, because *these* metals will never find their way into coins or circulate as the ring of Gyges did. The *Republic*'s economic theory loathes free money, hoarding, and the liquidation of property,[58] and in anticipation of what he will say later about those practices Socrates has described money that stays in its place. The new city's justice consists in a static condition comparable to what money would look like outside a cash economy.

Phoenician money-love does not exhaust what Socrates says about the metals. The ranking of citizens as golden and so on alludes more directly to the declining ages in Hesiod's *Works and Days.* Hesiod begins with the time of the golden people and follows humanity down to the iron types who now walk the earth; he only inserts a heroic age between bronze and iron, an age not corresponding to anything in the noble lie, to account for the Trojan War's participants. Later Socrates makes the allusion to Hesiod explicit, calling the city's classes the *genê* "genera, kinds, types" from Hesiod.[59]

Phoenician or Hesiodic, metals are used to moving, financially because money circulates, in Hesiod inasmuch as he organizes the ages chronologically. Regardless, the noble lie sorts its metals statically. It finds in Hesiod's chronicle of degeneration an image of human society in its finest state, synchronized by justice. Where Hesiod finishes off each age "concealed by earth"[60] the noble lie has them start out there, as if to reverse the old mythology. In fact this reversal is a trick. Time does not run backwards but stops altogether. The breeds that had marked mythical eras (as we speak of the age of dinosaurs) now do no more than coexist. There are no eras.

Athenian Stranger implies as much, *Laws* 5.747b–c. On the image of the Phoenicians, but also on complexities in that image, see Sommer (2010). On the modern stereotype's reinforcing ancient Semitic stereotypes see Burkert (1992, 36–38). The lie Phoenician in this sense (Charalabopoulos 2013, 320).

57 Rulers *timiôtatoi* "worthiest," Plato *Republic* 3.415a6; Sparta's iron money, Plutarch *Life of Lycurgus* 9.1–2.

58 Plato *Republic*: against too much wealth, 4.422a1; in oligarchy private treasures store gold, 8.550d5; property liquidation, 8.552a5–6. A landholder who converts property into cash is termed a "drone," being neither merchant nor manufacturer, not a knight and not a hoplite, 8.552a–c. In Book 1, Socrates does not so much criticize hoarding as mock it, when he pushes Polemarchus to conclude that justice is only useful in the care of useless money, money that has been deposited and sits idly: 1.333c. For more on Plato and money, see Chapter 8.

59 Human types: as ages, Hesiod *Works and Days* 110–180; the *genê* of Hesiod, Plato *Republic* 8.547a1.

60 Hesiod *Works and Days* says *gaia* "earth" covered or *ekalupse* "concealed" each age: gold, 121; silver, 140 (we also learn that Zeus *ekrupse* "hid" this group, 138); bronze, 156. The heroic age is the only one before the present that does not end up hidden underground, thanks to the blessed afterlife that at least some of them enjoy, 170.

Translating age into class might seem to undermine the purpose of warning the city's people away from injustice and civic decline. Hesiod's myth already told of human decline. Why make the myth static and then put it back to work accounting for a dynamic temporal process?

The *Republic*'s answer must be that collecting all the human types into a simultaneous population explains how history is possible. Decline means not that one kind of human dies off and another kind is born, but more comprehensibly that a worse type holds power. The city can now get worse even if the people in it do not. Indeed society has always been this way, made up of the same people, although other constitutions put those people in the wrong places.[61]

Once the decline does set in, history will proceed in the depressing direction that Hesiod promised. Van Noorden captures something true and profound about Socrates' use of Hesiod when she says that the poetic echoes "appropriate for the *Republic* the urgency of the wider ethical exhortation in the *Works and Days*."[62] It is as if Hesiod will have been right as soon as the good city fails. This one stable composition of human types is a relief from the same bad news about human society that everyone else has been reporting.

## Being dreams becoming

Dreams as resemblances of truth sometimes signify no more than error or illusion. But Socrates has rebuked Homer for attributing mendacious dreams to the gods. The gods may send predictive dreams; dreaming in the ordinary sense apparently results from thoughts entertained during waking life.[63]

In allowing these two possibilities for dreams Plato follows a tendency among those ancient authors who were not altogether skeptical about divine action in dreams. The dreams containing the residue of daytime thoughts and cares point back to memory not forward as premonitory dreams would do. Before Plato the distinction appears in Herodotus; centuries later Macrobius elaborates it; and even Artemidorus, in the only extant ancient book of dream interpretation, denies a dream's predictive value if the dreamer's waking experiences can account for what one sees when asleep.[64]

61 I believe that Charalabopoulos (2013, 323) has a point similar to this in mind with the assertion that Socrates improves upon Hesiod by turning the metals as sign of decline into a principle of justice.

62 Van Noorden (2010, 177).

63 Plato: dreams as confusion of appearance with truth, *Republic* 5.476c–d, *Theaetetus* 158b–c; contra Homer (*Iliad* 2.1–34) on false dreams from gods, *Republic* 2.383a; predictive dreams from gods, *Timaeus* 71e; implied, *Crito* 44b; dreams based on waking thoughts, *Republic* 9.571c (and may be implied in the *Theaetetus* passage cited).

64 Ancient skeptics about dreams include Aristotle *On Sleep-Divination* 463a25–27. Distinction between premonitory dreams from gods and the effect of the waking mind, Herodotus *Histories* 7.16b.2; Macrobius *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.3; Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 1.2. An example of waking experience that undercuts the dream's predictive

For the first citizens to have dreamt their childhoods as residual memories is out of the question. *Ex hypothesi* they had no earlier waking experiences whose decaying perceptions might have lingered in their dreams. The earth that acting as divine power gestated these humans would also have sent them their visions of childhood. These visions prove to be premonitory dreams, for the illusion of being in a city and seeing one's fellow citizens gives way to the reality of being in just that city, seeing those same fellow citizens.

Socrates proposes telling the city's first generation that their childhood passed *just as if* in a dream. But nothing *but* a dream would have come from a divinity and simulated waking experience; and as prophecy the dream seems to succeed.

Ancient dream interpretation often finds prediction operating through wordplay, as when Alexander's dream of a *saturos* "satyr" is read *sa Turos* "Tyre [is] yours," the prediction that he will conquer Tyre; or a dream about a ram becomes a promising omen thanks to the resemblance between *krios* "ram" and *kreiôn* "master." In Plato's childhood a comic character's dream could portray someone as *korax* "crow" to set up the insulting reference to him as *kolax* "lickspittle." Socrates himself ponders how to take the dream–command that he make *mousikê* "music, poetry, art," considering the word a symbolic name for philosophy the greatest music.[65] In this respect the dreamy quality of the new citizens' childhood points to the linguistic ambiguity that Socrates exploits in adapting poetry for his noble lie. He detemporalizes Hesiod so that the city can think about itself without past and history. He equates the city's *genê* with the Hesiodic *genê*, meaning the "kinds" or genera to be found in the city. Hesiod describes a golden *genos* that broadly implies a tribe, race, or kin-group, and specially the temporal sense "age, generation";[66] Socrates brings that golden *age* back as a golden *genus* not even reflective of kinship. The very need for the city to monitor the types within its classes follows from the metals' not reflecting kin-relations. Parents might have children with metals unlike their own because of the citizens' *suggeneis ontes pantes* "all being related," kin. The generic relation replaces the genetic one.[67]

meaning appears in *Oneirocritica* 4.59 (Walde 1999, 133). On the general distinction see Lewis (1976, 19–20).

65 Alexander and satyr, Plutarch *Life of Alexander* 2.4.5; ram and master, Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 2.12 (Artemidorus is writing late, when the *epsilon-iota* diphthong in Greek would have been pronounced much like the *iota*, thus enhancing the pun); crow and lickspittle, Aristophanes *Wasps* 42–45; Socrates and music, Plato *Phaedo* 60e–61b.

66 Hesiod *Works and Days* 109, 121, 127, 140, 143. For chronological meanings of *genos* in Homer, see *Iliad* 3.215 (Menelaus belonging to a *genos* after Odysseus's); *Odyssey* 3.245 (the generations [*genê*] governed by Nestor).

67 In some of Plato's dialogues the term takes on explicit logical meanings: *genos* "species, kind" as opposed to *meros* "part," *Statesman* 262a–263a; *genos* "genus" to be considered with or opposed to *eidos* "species," *Parmenides* 129c. Citizens all kin despite belonging to different *genê*, *Republic* 3.415a–b.

Likewise the lie's insistence that gold govern requires the verb *archein* "to rule, govern." Those "suited to govern" have gold in them, Socrates says. Those who rule must guard against a misassignment of metals.[68] This verb too has a temporal sense to which its sense in the noble lie is a later addition. The verb *archô* "to start, begin" and noun *archê* "beginning" refer to what is first in time; and within the *Republic*, although the *arch-* root clearly most often means rule and rulers,[69] the old idea of being first in time occurs too, as if to remind the reader what being first once meant.[70] In fact these temporal uses of the *arch-* noun or verb include a few allusions to the new city's beginning or founding moment.[71]

While the first new generation slept underground (as Socrates will tell them they did) they dreamt of having entered the world to parents and grandparents, and took themselves to be growing up in a world that had *genê* "generations" in it. They trained with Socrates and the city's other founders, and called that process the *archê* "beginning" of the new city. In the cryptic way of predictive dreams they saw the city ahead that they would occupy, where people of different kinds live in a single historical era, and where the philosopher's business is *archein* "to rule" not *archein* "to begin."

That first generation had dreamt of a world (*this* world) in which some things happened first and human types succeed one another temporally. They found their dream fulfilled in the world of the city, where natural *archê* is governance and a *genos* is a natural kind. This is how being dreams becoming, premonitorily – or rather how becoming imagines being's dreaming becoming. The first generation will earnestly try to believe this and they'll pass the message to their children. "You live in a timeless world." In that world the story can't be told of how longing for justice led to the foundational act that had been the longing's point and purpose. The city's founding by philosophers will have been a dream, if not the kind you explain away then the kind you think back on after the prediction came true and understand in terms of what subsequently happened.

68 Plato *Republic* 3.415a4, b3.

69 Plato *Republic*: *arch-* words common in Book 1, normally when Socrates asks about the nature of command, then again in Book 8 as he distinguishes constitutional forms. In those two books, the sense is mostly *non*temporal. In Book 1, see examples at 338e1, 339a2, 346e3; more than once apiece at 340e, 341a, 341c, 342e, 343e, 347b, 347d. For temporal sense ("from the beginning"), see 344c7, 348b8. In Book 8, see 551b3, 552b6, 558d3; more than once apiece at 545d, 550d, 551c. For the occasional temporal sense, see 565d3 ("the beginning" of a protector's transformation into a tyrant).

70 The noun and verb are ambiguous in some passages, sometimes with multiple appearances in a sentence or even a single phrase, and signifying start, governance, or basic principle. See Plato *Republic* 4.443b, 6.502e, 6.511c–d.

71 Plato *Republic*: clearly temporal *arch-* verb or noun, 1.344c7, 1.348b8, 2.366e (two mentions), 2.367a1, 2.377a10, 3.411b7, 4.432d9, 5.462a2, 10.619b5; with reference to starting a new city, 2.369c8–9 ("Come, let's make a city from the beginning"), 4.433a1–2 ("what we said in the beginning that everyone should do"), 5.453b3–4 (Socrates and Glaucon agreed "in the beginning of founding a city" that citizens perform their own task).

## Ship of state

In yet another appropriation of an outside authorial voice, Socrates combines elements from two plays by Aristophanes to conjure up "the ship of state." This story or scenario does not properly belong in the present chapter, because Socrates is using it to explain a point to Glaucon and Adeimantus, not to motivate the people of a future polity. While partly succeeding as *apologia* for Socrates, the ship also shows from yet another perspective that the founding philosopher will lack a place in the new city.

In the ship-of-state passage, the scheming underlings from Aristophanes' *Knights* who serve a benighted symbol of the public now appear on board ship as its politicking crew, again maneuvering to gain the ear of a well-intentioned but inept master. One sailor in the bunch actually knows how to pilot a ship; the others call him *meteôroskopos* "stargazer, heaven-watcher," and gratuitously on top of that *adoleschês* "babbler."[72] Socrates is called the same names, both inside Plato's dialogues and out – these are "epithets popularly associated with Socrates during his lifetime" – and anyone familiar with his appearances in the Platonic dialogues will recognize the navigator's likeness to him. So will anyone who knows about Socrates through *Clouds*, where the character Socrates alienates the play's hero Strepsiades until Strepsiades sets the Socratic school on fire. This character spouts cosmology and teaches advanced logic-splitting, which is to say on the one hand that he has studied *meteôra* "the skies," on the other hand that his associates are *adoleschois* "babblers."[73] The Socrates from *Clouds* has wandered into a production of *Knights* and found himself unable to influence its action.

Adeimantus remarks on how often Socrates uses likenesses or images when he speaks. This image will have to be composed out of other elements, because fine people like philosophers are in such a vexed position that nothing exists to compare them to. For someone representing and defending the philosopher in a present-day city, it's necessary to do what painters do when they draw a *tragelaphos* "goat-stag," combining models into a single picture.[74]

Socrates exactingly introduces this image as a *tragelaphos,* that is, a compound of meaningful ideas that combine to name something impossible even incoherent. As *kunalôpêx* "dog-fox" (a word from *Knights*[75]) also did,

72 Plato *Republic* Book 6: *meteôroskopos*, 488e4; *adoleschês*, 489a1.

73 "Epithets" for Socrates (Keyt 2006, 197). Aristophanes *Clouds*: Socrates studied *meteôra*, 228; Strepsiades calls the Socratics, *adoleschois*, 1485. Socrates refers to the charge of his interest in *meteôra* at Plato *Apology* 18b5, and the word comes up with clear reference to him at *Statesman* 299b7–8. In Plato, *adoleschein* "to babble" is said of Socrates at *Phaedo* 70d10–e1; *Theaetetus* 195b10, 193c1–2. Also see Xenophon *Economics* 11.3 for *adoleschein*, Xenophon *Symposium* 6.6 for *meteôra.*

74 Plato *Republic* Book 6: Socrates uses likenesses, 487e; this one composed of separate elements, 488a.

75 Aristophanes *Knights* 1069–1074.

*tragelaphos* meant something impossible.[76] Nothing matches the predicament that a philosopher is in, in the kind of city we know, villainized instead of being hailed, and in fact villainized for the reasons one should be hailed. But then, as philosophers point out routinely, something nonexistent can still be thought of, inasmuch as our pictures and words about fictitious creatures combine the characteristics of two things that do exist.[77] The centaur does not exist, but men do and horses do, and a painter mixes the two into a nonexistent thing you can look at.

Goat–stag and dog–fox have more than that in common, both terms conjoining animals that differ as wild from domesticated, or as nature differs from culture. Dog and fox are canines. Goats and deer both have horns and hooves and walk nimbly, but the goat is a domesticated ruminant and the dear is a ruminant in the wild. If the hybridization that makes a centaur represents the possibility that the human can't be told from the animal, the word *tragelaphos* names the fragility of a distinction between domestic or civilized and wild or natural.[78]

The combined stage setting from *Knights* and *Clouds* serves one purpose effectively, answering Aristophanes' slander against Socrates. As author of both plays Aristophanes makes himself a self-defeating witness, because his right assessment of democratic culture in *Knights* explains what is wrong with *Clouds*' mockery of Socrates as outsider. *Knights* equates democratic politics with unprincipled, self-serving behavior, and yet *Clouds* equates the critic of democracy with corrupting sophistry.

Still on either account the philosopher will fail to steer the city, whether because of his failings or the democracy's. The Aristophanic sources do not subvert the *Republic*'s political aspirations: Socrates is using those sources exactly for the purpose of showing why, in any ordinary version of the present world, philosophers will not govern and must be seen as unfit to govern. If even good replacement-leaders in Aristophanes need the same old political skills, a philosophical leader who lacks such skill will never hold power.

76 The *tragelaphos* becomes a definite example of nonexistent thing in Aristotle: *De Interpretatione* I 16a16; *Prior Analytics* I.38 49a24; *Posterior Analytics* II.7 92b5–8. Goat–stag and sphinx exist nowhere, *Physics* 4.1 208a30.

77 In the *Frogs*, Euripides claims to have abstained from speaking of a *tragelaphos* as Aeschylus did, and as "Median [Persian] tapestries" depict: 937–938. The Aeschylean tragedy that contains the word has been lost. Later in antiquity Athenaeus treats *tragelaphos* as the name of a drinking cup: *Deipnosophistae* 11.102, and see 11.27, 11.68. This must mean a cup shaped like the beast in question, therefore implying a tradition of visual representations.

78 Franks (2009) connects the impossible zoology with the ends of the earth, citing Aristotle on hybrid births in Libya, Diodorus Siculus on hybrids in India. Aristotle *Generation of Animals* 2.7 746a29–b13; Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 2.51.2–3, at Franks (2009, 267). Franks and I come to similar conclusions about the marginal status of a *tragelaphos*, but the uncertainty about nature and culture strikes me as more specific and also more germane to the problem of the philosopher in city politics. On the centaur and difference, including gender difference, see duBois (1982, 32).

To the Aristophanic components Socrates merely adds "a common metaphor" for the city that had become familiar from lyric verse and tragedy. Rulers steer the ship of state through all the dangers we might call its stormy waters.[79] In the *Republic*'s implied contrast, "a free and competently managed ship symbolizes an ideal city."[80] The metaphor lets Socrates makes a compliment of the insult about him that Aristophanes popularized. You might see the philosopher as a stargazer, but in a ship at night you need someone familiar with the starry skies.

What seems like pointless knowledge in the realm of *nomos* or culture has a natural application out in the wilds. The philosopher as *tragelaphos* stargazes in organized society and therefore has no value, then stargazes invaluably out on the sea.

But this "stargazing" cheats as a rebuttal of Aristophanes. It literalizes his insulting metaphor and invents a symbolic place where that metaphor pays a compliment – as if answering the description of academics in ivory towers by imagining a country where a watcher in a tower spotted invaders coming. Well, sure. If it weren't an insult it wouldn't be bad. The point behind the insult remains, that the ivory-towered stargazer does not function in the herd along with the rest of the goats. Aristophanes would conclude what Socrates introduces his comedies to prove, that philosophers cannot take over and rule.

The ship of state fails to answer Aristophanes in this last respect, and in that way the *tragelaphos* label carries an undesirable meaning. *Clouds* called Socrates a sophist and maker of new sophists; and the sophist is, Plato tells us, the wild version of the philosopher, wolf to the philosopher's dog.[81] No matter who portrays Socrates, he belongs outside the social world. And so beyond the practical question whether a philosopher could join with kings to make the new city happen, the Aristophanic story, even transformed, preserves Aristophanes' portrayal of the philosopher as outside civilization: hence maybe outside the new city's civilization too: founding the city but never able to live in it.

## Conclusion

The materials from old Greece that Socrates proposes introducing into the new city act out the exclusion of the founding philosopher. Autochthony

79 "Common metaphor" (McGlew 1993, 60). Creon in *Antigone* spoke of the *salos* "toss of the waves" with which the gods had shaken the city: Sophocles *Antigone* 163 (and see a similar metaphor at *Oedipus Tyrannus* 922–923); earlier Pindar advised governing the people *dikaiôi pêdaliôi* "with a just rudder": Pindar *Pythian Ode* 1.86. McGlew also cites Archilochus 105 West, and Alcaeus fragment 208, which spells out the analogy at length (McGlew 1993, 60n18). There are already sailing metaphors throughout *Knights*: see 430–435, 542–545, 756, 1300–1312.

80 Keyt (2006, 189).

81 Aristophanes *Clouds*: Pheidippides, student of Socrates, will beat mother, 1441–1443; Socrates a sophist, 1309; trains sophists, 1111. Plato *Sophist*, 231a: sophist as wild animal.

takes place without a father who sowed the city. Homeric antiquity dwindles to an anecdote in which the devotee of Apollo fails to persuade an irascible king. No ancient history survives and surely no tale of the city's founding.

Hesiod might be thought to have snuck his own depressing politics into the noble lie. Does Socrates imagine the city's decline because Hesiod told of time's inevitable worsening? That conclusion has something easy about it. The *Republic* does not need Hesiod for an idea of political decline, and the stages by which a city declines differ too much from Hesiod's history of degeneration to make the comparison useful. Where the new city's literature is concerned, a lingering message will not get through to undo what philosophers have done. The censoring act hurts the philosophers' accomplishment quite well enough by succeeding rather than in its failure. On any story there will be no act by which the philosopher found a population in the compromised world and used it to found the promised new version of the world.

The exceptional city now appears unable to know its own exceptionalism. The withdrawal of the origin may shelter the city from history, but will also keep philosophy hidden in that city, for however much the citizens come to respect and trust the philosophers who govern, they will not learn that philosophy made the government.

On one vision of philosophy this is only as it should be. When philosophy is just clear thinking about reality, the philosophical plan for a human society comes out identical to one that comes to be through the spontaneous workings of nature. And yet *the natural* as concerns human social arrangements cannot be the customary or the generally occurring, given the pathology in politics to which the good city stands as exception. We'd have no need for philosophy, inside the city or out in the world, if good constitutions came to be through natural processes; the *Republic*'s argument remains conscious that they do not; for that matter the people in the new city, who routinely go to war against cities with other constitutions, will recognize their own unusual nature even if ignorant of its origins. The lean fighters unattracted to loot will play one wealth-obsessed rival city against the other.[82] They will realize that wealth and faction, in general injustice, typify politics.

So how did their city escape the general contagion? Surely not by a natural process, if what is natural means what occurs as a rule. But they can't give the answer that Socrates gives to Glaucon and the others, that philosophers chanced to take control, because it is exactly that lucky event that has been written out of the new city's culture. The philosopher wild enough to create the city cannot live in it, not even in its thoughts. And by not knowing the philosopher who made the city come to be, the city will fail to know its own nature as exception to the law of becoming. The exceptional justice in the new

82 Plato *Republic*: inevitability of war, 2.373e; soldiers experienced in war (thus on frequent campaigns), 5.467d–e; see especially on wartime negotiations with other cities, and awareness of the differences between them, 4.422d.

city requires an exceptional founding act, but that is just the act that is being kept hidden from the city.

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# 5 "And then I saw"

## The myth of Er and the future city

"The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was":[1] Nick Bottom after waking, the words that never served him all that well now rising up in open rebellion.[2]

Bottom looks back at his time among the sprites and his change from human to animal as if at a dream. Er 2000 years earlier, suddenly (if we believe Socrates) *anablepsas* "coming to, opening his eyes, seeing again" after a long trip through Hades, said that *idein … hauton* "he saw himself" lying on his own funeral pyre[3] and began to spread the word, unlike Bottom, *not* thinking he had dreamt it but sounding sure that he had not, bringing news about what happens in the domain beyond waking knowledge.

Socrates beginning the story says "I will not tell an accounting to Alcinous [*Alkinou … apologon*]" or "Alcinous report," as the central flashback in the *Odyssey* was known in which Odysseus told his Sinbad tale of wandering and his visit to the underworld.[4] The phrase "Alcinous report" was proverbial for a long story, and one thing Socrates' contrast means is that he will keep it brief. With people's souls at stake there is no time. Beyond that the phrase implies "a self-conscious opposition between Homer's myth and Plato's own."[5]

Another difference from Shakespeare's mechanical: Bottom says regarding the song of his dream "I shall sing it at her death,"[6] planning to entertain the wedding party with a last lament for Thisbe. In a comedy reality can feel light

1 Under the title "What Becomes of a Soul," versions of this chapter were delivered at the Asian chapter of the International Plato Society in Taipei (April 2018), at the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy in Newport News, Virginia (October 2018), and at the Philosopher's Library series at Vassar College (October 2019). For their invitations and support, I owe special thanks to Hua-kuei Ho, Elizabeth Jelinek, Sofia Ortiz-Hinojosa, Gwenda-lin Grewal, and Douglas Winblad. I am grateful to many people for comments, but especially to Yuji Kurihara, Daniel Mailick, Osman Nemli, and Christopher C. Raymond.

2 Shakespeare *Midsummer Night's Dream* 4.1.211–214.

3 Plato *Republic* 10.621b7–8.

4 Plato *Republic* 10.614b2.

5 Capra (2010, 201).

6 Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night's Dream* 4.1.218.

as a dream, and no one rushes to tell others about it. Socrates will not save his story for later, certainly not for a funeral. He would have it told to people before they die, to ensure that human beings take care with their souls. If we believe this story, "we'll do well," he says, "both hereabouts [*enthade*] and in the thousand-year voyage" that one takes after leaving this world.[7] While we live *enthade* "around here," even literally here in Athens, pursuing justice will keep our souls healthy. As for the future – well, if the story is true, then the further ahead you look, the more justice matters.

Socrates says that the story was "saved and not destroyed," thanks to Er's timely revival on his pyre and dissemination of his story.[8] Having gone almost untold the words survive to be passed around. If words can be grateful you might expect the ones in this story to thank Socrates by doing as they're told, unlike the words in Bottom's refractory lexicon. A rescued story will say what it is supposed to and mean what the teller intends it to mean.

On the other hand, a lot is being asked of these words. Undeniable energy propels this narrative, and yet until its close at the end of the *Republic* the reader can't be sure where the story is going to land. What did God put the myth of Er on earth to do? Or better, given the older sources that Socrates has absorbed to create this story: What new task does the myth of Er have to perform that its predecessors did not? (How will its work differ from the work that had been assigned to the Alcinous report?[9])

For example the myth claims that the afterlife settles up accounts for all lives now past, lest anyone seem to have died without paying or being repaid for their actions. The virtuous experience a millennium's delight, the vicious a punishment lasting at least as long. But the myth also considers lives in the future, in a time after the end of rewards and penalties, following the souls through their peregrinations until they shoot like *asteras* "stars" into the bodies they have chosen to occupy next.[10] Where does this orientation toward the future come from in the Greek and non-Greek sources one can detect at work in the Er story?[11] For all the allegations (going back to late antiquity) of Orphism in the dialogues, the Orphics do not definitely promise reincarnation into new bodies.[12] Even the Pythagoreans' doctrinal attachment to

7 Plato *Republic* 10.621d2–3.

8 Plato *Republic* 10.621b6.

9 On the work done by the Alcinous report see Most (1989). Most gives a persuasive accounting of the narrative Odysseus delivers on the island of the Phaeacians, spelling out its concentric architecture and giving it a narrative purpose for Odysseus. Yet he concedes that on his account the visit to the underworld is unjustified.

10 Plato *Republic* 10.621b4. On the next-worldly emphasis, see Ferrari (2009, 126).

11 See Halliwell (1988, 169–170) with subsequent comments on the passages for which influences on Plato have been claimed. Sources for which such claims have been made include Orphism, Pythagoreanism, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism. On out-of-body travel see Bremmer (1983, 13–69).

12 Olympiodorus says Plato everywhere *parôidei* "parodies" Orphic ideas: *Commentary on Phaedo* 7.10.10. Edmonds (2014) takes *parôidei* to imply Orphic influence, but most uses of

reincarnation is open to challenges.[13] And as Lowell Edmonds has observed, classical authors routinely tag reincarnation as an obscure or exotic teaching, hence a nonstandard idea about death deriving from no certain source.[14]

That Plato did not simply take over an established look to the future in stories about Hades reinforces its anticipatory function as the myth's point. Is his orientation toward the future another part of what Socrates means when he promises not to tell an Alcinous story?

It takes imagination to turn the silent dead into Homer's multitude that *thespesiêi iachêi* "shrieks divinely"[15]; but nothing like the willful imagining that pivots a tale of death to tell of new life and a future generation. The myth of Er carries the weight of encompassing past and future; it demonstrates the full advantage of philosophy as a story about future embodied life. Besides being the end of something this death is the beginning of something.

The words for telling Er's story now have to do more than the Homeric story was made for, as Bottom's words do when they try to evoke his ineffable experiences. The myth of Er inscribes the difference between philosophers and everyone else into the *Republic*'s ethics. It promises that philosophy makes justice possible, and long spells of happiness, when people grant it oversight over their lives. All told the myth brings justice into the universe by combining the right consequences for the life that preceded death with the right credit or blame for the life that will follow.

But to reveal the superiority of his salvational philosophy Plato has to contrast it with the myopia and oversight and generally erroneous vision of those who fail to see the way philosophers do. As a rule Platonic philosophers see where others do not[16]; *failure to see* is a multiple and evasive condition in the *Republic* at large as it is in the myth of Er specifically. Nonphilosophers sometimes seem to see somewhat, dreamily and in a haze; sometimes perversely and with eyes in the wrong direction. How philosophical seeing exceeds the other kind does not admit of a single explanation.[17]

the word indicate mockery (thus Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 4.52, on mockery by Bion); so Olympiodorus's claim may come to less than it seems.

13 Pythagoreans are associated with reincarnation even when with nothing else (Huffman 2009). Nevertheless, some testimony to Pythagorean reincarnation (e.g., Herodotus *Histories* 4.95, whose statement by Zalmoxis was assimilated to Pythagoreanism) tend to describe death as an end. Thus Hieronymus (in Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 8.21) says that Pythagoras reported seeing Homer and Hesiod punished in Hades for what they said about the gods, the antireincarnational implication being that their underworld confinement would have no end.

14 Edmonds (2014). Reincarnation tagged as nonstandard: "some old story," Plato *Phaedo* 70c; the word of "wise men and women," *Meno* 81a; Egyptian, Herodotus *Histories* 2.123; Persian, Theopompus (Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 1.1.9; and see discussion in Chapter 9).

15 Homer *Odyssey* 11.43.

16 On this view with reference to the afterlife, see Edmonds (2004, 194).

17 My reading follows Claudia Baracchi's treatment of the predominating visual elements in the myth (Baracchi 2002, 177–213). Also see Segal (1978, 324) on underworld vision and the "eye of the soul."

The *Republic*'s difficulty in providing a single stable meaning for sight and failure to see leaves questions dangling about the myth of Er as a guide to the individual soul. For those additionally hoping to imagine a new city ahead, the explanatory difficulty makes special trouble. It blurs the *Republic*'s picture of the future, leaving us unable to tell whether that coming version of what is *enthade* might be a place that contains the philosophers' city.

This final chapter about the *Republic* will focus on the dialogue's closing myth and maybe most spectacular quoted material as its last hope for the new city. A city that escapes the world's tendency toward tyranny will have to start with heroes; the myth of Er might even show where these people come from; and yet the myth's central word for witnessing buckles under the pressure put on it, until it seems the great spectacle ahead might not find its spectators.

## From the embodied world and back into it

In the afterlife that Socrates heard about, most souls receive a standard treatment: 1000 years of tenfold retribution or reward for what they did in their preceding life, followed by the opportunity to choose their next incarnation. But as he also does elsewhere in the *Republic*, Socrates pays special attention to opposite extreme types, tyrant and philosopher, whom as I have argued we might risk mistaking for each other; whom the world might misidentify with one another if philosophy seizes power. For everyone besides those two, a millennium of delight or correction will suffice. For these exceptional types, more lies ahead both good and bad.

More lies ahead obviously for the surpassingly wicked, who try to return from the place of punishment after their thousand-year term ends, only to find the exit closed. Er hears about a horrid tyrant "Ardiaius the Great" who will evidently be kept confined forever in a realm of Hades identified with the Tartarus of traditional mythology, as other incurables (mostly tyrants) also will be.[18] The tyrant that Thrasymachus brought into the *Republic*'s conversation, that Glaucon made the standard human in his story about Gyges, and that the *Republic*'s history portrayed as vivid and hopeless in Book 9, continues to occupy the argument's central cautionary role.

It soothes the soul to know that the most malevolent characters never return. On the other hand souls once decent can lead lives to come whose depravity matches anything the old tyrants did. The myth of Er acknowledges that possibility when it shows the soul of a good citizen choosing to be born a tyrant.[19]

Meanwhile, though by another route, the reward for the best souls, the philosophers', exceeds the reward assigned to those who lived just lives of an

18 Plato *Republic* 10.615c–616a. Tartarus, 615a4. Tartarus was associated with Hesiod: *Theogony* 682, 725, 736, 822. But Yamagata (2010, 86n60) says "Plato clearly marks it as Homeric" at *Phaedo* 111e–112a.

19 Plato *Republic* 10.619b–c.

ordinary kind. The surpassingly good get the same happy thousand years as other just people; after that time is up they do not experience a counterpart to the tyrant's being kept below for more punishment. No one confines them in "heaven" for unending rewards, and they continue to cycle through bodily lives forever.[20] But the life to come will turn out happily for philosophers in a more reliable way than it does for other people. All souls select their next incarnation, and the philosopher, who always makes good choices, can anticipate an endless series of happy lives. The joy with which souls approach their moment of selecting a new life indicates the degree to which this myth focuses on life in the body and what comes next.[21]

The life-selection comes at the end of the myth. The souls after reward or punishment travel to the center of the universe and domain of the Fates. The myth details their space-travellers' vision of the stellar and planetary orbits with the expository deliberateness of early science fiction. ("We emerged from warp drive on the outskirts of a new solar system," etc.[22]) In this spot the souls take turns, according to a random order, examining *paradeigmata* "patterns" of available lives. Each soul looks into the life-patterns strewn over the *gên* "ground, earth" of heaven and chooses the one it wants to inhabit.[23]

The *paradeigma* of a life reveals something less than a complete enactment of the existence being patterned. Souls find the outline or summary of a life and a record of the external conditions of that life: one's gender, class, property, and the like. The *taxis* "organization, ordering" that the soul living that life will have is excluded from the pattern, because (as Socrates explains) "the *taxis* necessarily becomes different with the different life chosen."[24] Choosing wisely requires weighing the positive and negative effects that physical beauty

20 Halliwell (1988, 189): "There is no clear indication of an escape from the cycle of reincarnations." Other reincarnation-stories in Plato offer eventual release, *Phaedrus* 248e–249a; the *Phaedo* selects those to be reincarnated, 81a, 82b10, 113a, 114c. Given Adeimantus's complaint about an afterlife that rewards virtue with "a perpetual drunk" at *Republic* 2.363d1, the happiness that this dialogue offers to just souls ought to occur in life.

21 Plato *Republic* 10.614e. Gonzalez (2012, 261) emphasizes this joy, as Proclus did in antiquity.

22 Where are the souls? They are sometimes described as "outside the universe"; but the view they have only requires that they be "on higher ground" (Halliwell 1988, 177). They reach this point after leaving the meadow from which souls depart for reward or punishment and to which they return; that place is "presumably adjacent to the judges' location between the chasms of sky and earth" (Halliwell 1988, 174). So it is not the subterranean meadow of Homer *Odyssey* 11.539, 573. Together with the image of souls' shooting like "stars" into their bodies at *Republic* 10.621b4, these heavenly locations suggest an outerworld rather than an underworld.

Solar system: I am grateful to Zoë Cunliffe for a conversation about the myth of Er as science fiction, when she filled out the comparison with this space-voyaging analog to Plato's picture of the whorl-orbits at *Republic* 10.616b–617d.

23 Plato *Republic* Book10: random order, 617e; *paradeigmata*, 618a1; placed *epi tên gên* "on the ground," 618a1–2.

24 Plato *Republic* 10.618b2–4. In rendering this sentence I was helped by Grube and Reeve (1992).

has on a soul, or the effects of wealth or poverty, poor health, and so on for all the circumstances one finds oneself in.[25]

Study the life's pattern and you can infer what condition the soul will be in, if you know anything about souls. But "study" could describe any one of several ways of scrutinizing, depending on what a *paradeigma* or a *bios* "life" is supposed to look like. Modern readers might think of synoptic biography. In the Greek-speaking world after Alexander, and then during the Roman Empire, biographies aimed at covering entire lives. Plutarch's *Lives* define that ancient genre for modern readers; the extant Gospels, which probably first appeared during Plutarch's lifetime, share features with what he took biography to be.[26] But in fifth-century Athens it is hard to find plausible examples of either biography or autobiography. Arnaldo Momigliano follows the trail of every hint of a mention of such writings, and cautions against generalizations about lost genres, but still concludes that "neither biography nor autobiography became prominent literary genres in Greece in the fifth century B.C."[27]

Some biography did develop after the death of Socrates; but writings about Socrates turn the genre into a mix of biographical report, personal defense, and philosophical extrapolation.[28] Plato would have had to treat available biographies as the model for his life-patterns even while he participated in transforming biography into something far removed from such examples.

In any case the lives that the souls look at contain information about life-circumstances and nothing about the state of character. Very few biographers leave their subject's soul out of the story with such rigor.

The fourth century (when Plato was writing) contained simple biographical writing on gravestones; Momigliano cites "the well-known fact that in the fourth century BC epigrams on tombs contain more biographical details than those of former centuries." Surviving inscriptions for a certain Eteocles say he left farming to become a seagoing merchant and died in a squall; for a priestess, that she served Demeter then the Kabeiris and then Cybele, and bore two sons; for Pisistratus (if this was truly his epitaph) that the Athenians made him tyrant three times and banished him three times, and that he gathered Homeric fragments into whole works. Such summaries could lie around the otherworldly ground inviting souls to begin life by choosing an epitaph.[29]

25 Plato *Republic* 10.618c–d.

26 On the Gospels and Plutarch's brand of biography see Licona (2016).

27 Momigliano (1993, 38). For models of the alternatives available in the fourth century, see 43–64.

28 Momigliano (1993, 46): "Biography acquired a new meaning when the Socratics moved to the zone between truth and fiction which is so bewildering to the professional historian."

29 Momigliano (1993, 43) ("the well-known fact"). For a selection of ancient funerary inscriptions see Wolfe (2013: Eteocles, p. 38 [see the *Greek Anthology* 7.532]; priestess, p. 83; Pisistratus, p. 15).

For centuries the Greeks buried curse tablets near the tombs of the unquiet dead to communicate with chthonic spirits.[30] Why not picture tombstone inscriptions that tell the underworld's shades about life aboveground, given that tombstones are how heaven keeps in touch with earth?

On the other hand the myth tells of souls that enter the lives of animals.[31] An eagle's life story is scarcely credible; an epitaph is impossible. The headstone for a pig in Macedonia calls that unlucky animal "friend to everyone," as a human's stone might do; and the *Greek Anthology* includes epitaphs for a heifer, a dolphin, and other animals.[32] Still we strain to visualize what information the souls would find in such texts that might guide their choices.

If lion, eagle, and swan fail among either biographies or epitaphs, they work excellently as constellations. Constellations for those animals appear in Hellenistic catalogs of the night sky, and the concept of catasterism, placement among the stars, dates at least as far back as Plato's predecessor Pherecydes.[33] Not only does the myth of Er speak of souls' flying like stars to be born; Plato's *Timaeus* associates every human soul with a star, apparently echoing a popular idea of the day.[34] The souls preparing for birth out around the planetary orbits inspect the patterns of stars, choose the one depicting the life they'd like, and then in reversed catasterism shoot down to earth to live that way.

The story would even explain what the patterns are doing up there. The souls find these patterns *epi tên gên* "on the earth" of heaven; heaven's earth is very possibly the sky. What we looking up call constellations, they find lying on the ground.[35]

Constellation, epitaph, and biography all commemorate mortal lives. It takes care and moral seriousness to survey the lives available with an eye to their progress and final worth, comparable to the attentiveness one ought to

30 Johnston (2013, 71–80).

31 Plato *Republic* Book 10: *zôiôn … pantôn bious*, "lives of all kinds of animals," 618a3–4; soul of Orpheus choosing a swan's life, 620a4; soul of Thamyras a nightingale's, 620a6–7; of Aias/Ajax, a lion's, 620b1–3; of Agamemnon, an eagle's, 620b4–5; of Thersities, an ape or monkey's, 620c3.

32 *Greek Anthology*: heifer, 7.169; dolphin, 7.214; see 7.304 for a collective epitaph that includes a horse and the family dog. For the pig stele, see the Ephorate of Antiquities of Pella, AKA 1674.

33 Pherecydes fragment 148, quoted in Hyginus *Astronomica* 2.21, speaks of "catasterism" as the process by which the gods set human beings among the stars. Hyginus is an example of a later ancient author who includes the lion, eagle, and swan among constellations. See *Astronomica* 2.16, 2.24, 2.8, respectively.

34 Plato *Timaeus* 42b. A character in Aristophanes speaks of becoming a star as if that were commonly believed: Aristophanes *Peace* 833.

35 Onians (1988, 403–404) proposes that *paradeigmata* be understood as unspun wool, which would permit them to be spun into the thread of one's fate after the choosing. See Halliwell (1988, 183). The vision of one's rough wool spun into a life is irresistible, but one wonders how you'd find the life's externalities and events there. Some cultures do however use unspun wool when telling futures (Il'ina and Uljašev 2012, 318).

bring to every deliberation in earthly life. The readers of this myth who emphasize its value as an allegory for daily deliberation during life are responding to the close resemblance between these small- and large-scale examples of decision-making.[36] And the nice thing about every plausible interpretation of these life-patterns is that one can either skim or peruse them. Biographies and grave inscriptions exist as written words, therefore as visible objects that can be known to a better or worse degree. You can glance at words, read them cursorily, or study them.

Modern city-dwellers see only occasional stars. But identifying constellations in a replete night sky takes persistent looking and long familiarization. If not as systematically as written text nevertheless the sky's stars can be looked over and looked into with different degrees of attention.

## The life to be examined

The myth aims at a moral, in the form of Socrates' concluding words. Those who are thoughtfully virtuous will "do well both hereabouts [*enthade*]" and in the long trip through the millennial circuit that reaches its destination hereabouts again.[37] Ordinary just behavior wins you a thousand-year reward but will not assure a good choice for the following go-round. "Each of us ought to pay attention to this subject, neglecting the others to be a student and seeker" of knowledge about lives and what each type does good or bad for the soul living it.[38]

We respect law-abiding behavior well enough but this is something different, distinguished not by habit but by study: *apobleponta* "looking at, regarding, contemplating" the nature of one's soul.[39] Somewhat as Socrates describes the city's rulers at some length before divulging that they are philosophers, the *Republic*'s moral psychology begins as an image of the ordinary virtuous person, only later identifying the philosopher as the supremely virtuous one and opposite to the tyrant.[40] The virtue one needs cannot occur without deliberate and careful judgment.

36 McPherran (2010, 143) describes an allegorical reading of this sort; another appears in Thayer (1988). Halliwell (2007, 469–470) attends to both ways of reading the myth. Gonzalez (2012, 273) says the myth "can" be read this way. Mailick (2018) develops and defends this reading. I mainly resist the reading because deliberations in the myth (during the choice of lives) take place after one's punishment or reward. One is aware of the reward or punishment. (1) In life, even if the virtuous know themselves to be happy, the vicious do not perceive their misery. So punishment and reward have no clear analogs. (2) In life, virtuous deliberations tend to lead to more; likewise the vicious. Nothing within a mortal life is said by Plato to correspond to this perpetual exchange of happy life after unhappy after happy.

37 Plato *Republic* 10.621d2–3.

38 Plato *Republic* 10.618c1–2.

39 Plato *Republic* 10.618d7.

40 See the comparison between them at Plato *Republic* 9.581e–587c. For one narrative of how the philosopher–portrait develops through the *Republic*, see Ferrari (2009, 125).

The myth confirms the moral of thoughtful virtue when it describes the *metabolê* "change, exchange, swap" of reincarnational good and bad results for most souls. Those who lived unjustly come to the choosing-grounds from a punitive millennium desperate for a better life. They give each pattern a good going-over before deciding on one. The souls of those who lived decent lives arrive at the same place after a thousand years of plenitude, therefore disposed to scan life-plans as one might read a contract after a heavy lunch.[41] They could choose better but don't.

The threat of swap after swap, good lives for bad, makes philosophy the key to divine reward exceeding the reward that most upright people get. Philosophers find one lifetime after another its own reward. They come closest to the liberation from all reincarnation promised in other dialogues.[42] Socrates also offers a second causal principle behind the choices souls make: "according to the habit or tendency of the previous life." Atalanta, the mannish athletic woman, extends and enhances her previous life (Socrates presenting this as enhancement) by coming back as a male athlete. Ajax returning after his unsatisfied warrior's life and suicide would compensate for the disappointment of humanity with a lion's life.[43]

The two grounds for souls' choices might be logically compatible. Reading the life ahead either closely or lazily accounts for how worthy the life will be, while being guided by memories of the life before determines which area of life one enters. One can choose to live as a wise athlete or a foolish one, a brave or cowardly farmer. Difficult cases will suggest themselves (Is there a good tyrant's life?), but the principle is mysterious enough without hard cases. The interchange of good and bad adequately accounts for the purpose behind this story, that eternal happiness requires not virtue alone but virtue informed by philosophy. At best the thought of some connection by habit between one life and the next only ensures that living philosophically once disposes you to choose philosophical living again. Good news for philosophers, sorry news for everyone else, everyone else now evidently barred from choosing a philosopher's life.[44]

The causal generalization makes an overarching story of the soul possible: continuity from life to life. Hearing the story as someone who is still breathing you should be able to imagine the next life you undergo as your own. Someone as similar to you as a craftswoman is to Epeius, or an ape to Thersites, will live that good or bad life. People today may begin saving for retirement at the age of 20, unable to imagine themselves at 70, but still feeling

41 Plato *Republic* 10.619d.

42 Ferrari (2009, 129). The myths in Plato do not always call for universal reincarnation (Halliwell 1988, 189). So Plato may have a special reason for returning philosophers endlessly to life. Maybe a political reason?

43 Plato *Republic* Book 10: "according to the habit," 620a2–3; Atalanta and Ajax, 620b.

44 McPherran (2010, 136) develops this concern. Annas (1982, 135) proposes that even most philosophical souls choose worse lives next, but her reasons for saying so are unclear.

close enough to that future incarnation to want to provide a good income (even at their present expense). The life choices that connect you now to that being who lives a thousand years later make it matter to you that the other life ahead is lived happily.[45]

If the enduring habit gives a still-embodied soul an interest in the life it will enter in some future world, it also creates a pedigree for newly reborn souls of interest to the world they are entering. We look at an infant or child and contemplate the life it must have lived before this one. And who could care about those old pedigrees? Only the residents of this world who want to see a new constitution established here. When Hades becomes the source of future life not just the end of past lives, it creates the possibility of the old heroes' rearriving in new cities, and with that possibility the need for rulers who can look at a child and see the life it had known before.

The myth of Er makes good enough sense as a story about justice and souls and regardless of its political import. Its bearing on justice in individual lives might lead readers to overlook how it speaks to political justice. But if the argument of the *Republic* has any point it is that individual justice and political justice may share causes and qualities. The story's relevance to souls does not preclude its speaking of cities. Socrates announced that he would not tell the underworld story from Homer. Remember the "long-time quarrel," philosophy *lakeruza* "baying" at poetry, which had fancied itself philosophy's master. And Socrates' first challenges to Homer's wisdom (in Book 10) had been: What city was established better because of you? What city names you as lawgiver and benefactor? The Platonic passage to rival Homer that political good-for-nothing really ought to move, as *he* never moved, toward establishing a better constitution.[46]

The myth of Er acknowledges politics when it reports on one tyrant's permanent punishment and shows where another tyrant comes from. And if the underworld is so constituted as to account for cities' constitutions, there might be more questions we can ask the myth regarding the word that appears tenth before the end of the *Republic*: *enthade*: the here and now: the world in which the philosopher would like to see a new city. We can ask the myth what it has to show or conceal with respect to the people needed in a philosopher's city. Will the myth of Er be able to encourage the hope for a new political

45 Halliwell (1988, 189) objects that the continuity requires memory from life to life. One will indeed not accumulate experience from one life to the next; but one does choose the next life with the memory of the last one still intact, and the thoughtful soul will choose the life that enhances the wisest choosing next time.

46 Plato *Republic* Book 10: long-time quarrel, 607b5–6; dog baying at *despotan* "master," 607b6; first challenge to Homer, 599d2-e3. The "baying at master" seems to come from lyric verse (Halliwell 1988, 155), which makes it poetry's description of philosophy; hence, poetry's taking itself to be the master, as if from poetry's point of view philosophizing were a kind of poetry that failed to recognize itself as such, hence failed to recognize poetry as master. Mateo Duque has pressed the argument against me that Book 10 no longer speaks of the Platonic city. I'm not convinced but I appreciate the discussion.

order's arrival? Or will the old myth that's still alive inside this one resist Plato's demiurgical efforts to reveal the new heavenly city?

## The blindness of the unjust

The heedless souls in heaven's life-market may be said to fail to see what their chosen lives contain. This failure resembles not seeing the misspelled word on a page. Sometimes it even happens that someone hands you a page saying "There's a typo," and yet you stare and don't catch the animal that should be an admiral. Reading is a seeing that has to be achieved.[47]

But the myth complicates its own conception of epistemic failure by attributing a second blindness to the dead souls.[48] It appears in a gratuitous detail early in the myth, as the souls of the newly dead appear in Hades. The souls separate into two groups just and unjust and march off to get what they deserve. Unsurprisingly the unjust go to the left and the just to the right, the unjust along a downward path and the just upwards. In addition Socrates says that the just souls wear a sign on their chests that they were judged to be just, while the sign of being declared unjust is worn by the other souls on their backs.[49]

Justice belongs on the right and higher rather than lower, on the assumption that right and high are better than their opposites. But even if the human body's front outranks the back, being as it is the direction we face, the strict parallel to right and upward would call for the just to walk forwards to their great reward, the unjust stumbling on their crab-walk down to hell.[50] Grant that justice belongs forward; why also speak of the *judgment* of justice on one's front?

The just know themselves to be just. The myth puts the markers on their chests, but these are disembodied souls and have no chests, so the image needs to be translated. A sign on a soul's chest is a sign that that soul is in a position to see and understand, while writing on the back of a soul indicates its obliviousness to its own vice.

47 Plato *Republic*: Seeing justice in soul and city as one reads words in small and large letters, 2.368d; learning to read, 3.402. Athenians savored examples of seeing letters but not reading them. In a scene used by more than one tragedian, an illiterate describes the marks he saw on a ship's sails, going through every letter so that the audience realizes he is spelling, for example, "Theseus." The scene occurs in Euripides' lost *Theseus* (fragment 382), then in plays by Agathon and Theodictas: Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 454b–d.

48 See Baracchi (2002, 200) on this blindness and the tension between seeing and occasional hearing in Er's experience.

49 Plato *Republic* 10.614c. Elsewhere a Platonic promise of the afterlife has souls of the bad marked with an insignia of their wrongdoing (Plato *Gorgias* 526b); the myth of Er adds the information that the mark appears on one's back.

50 Front and back in Plato, *Timaeus* 45a3–4; Halliwell (1988, 174). Casey (1993) begins by analyzing the three spatial dimensions in terms of human bodily experience and movement. This paragraph takes its cue from that book.

Maybe every damned soul sees the badge of condemnation on the backs of the others marching down to a hellish millennium.[51] The myth does not address that possibility. What we *can* say is that the assessment of any soul as unjust escapes the notice of that soul, and not because it looked at itself cursorily. Whatever the back of a soul is, it must describe what is invisible to the soul's view. The unjust come in for punishment not yet knowing they deserve it, because oblivious to the wrongdoing that earned them the punishment.

The unjust souls' blindness to themselves serves as final rejoinder to Glaucon's original challenge. In Book 2 he asks Socrates to show that justice resembles sight, thinking, and health, things considered good for their own sakes and also desired for their consequences; also that Socrates disclose how justice differs from medicine and exercise, the burdens that we take on only for the sake of what follows from them. Glaucon fears that justice belongs in the second category, and gives his examples about Gyges and the unjust man with a reputation for great virtue.[52] The secretly unjust seem to have the best of it, enjoying both the profits of their surreptitious injustice and the social benefits of squeaky-clean reputations.

Socrates spends the *Republic* answering this plea. In Book 10 he declares the conclusion of the *Republic*'s many arguments, letting himself scoff at the belief that invisibility helps the unjust. You can have the ring of Gyges if you like and even throw in the helmet of Hades, you will still feel the effects of unjust living.[53] If the argument of the dialogue holds up, invisibility will do you no good.

By itself Socrates' conclusion contains no countervailing image to shake the picture of that magic ring. Here the myth's suggestion of blindness comes in to replace the vicious person's invisibility. *For those who can't see, everything is invisible.* They do not see themselves being witnessed, so it seems to the unjust that they have hidden their injustice. In fact they have only lost the power to see what it did to them, hence the ability to realize that other people see the workings of injustice. The unjust don't get away with anything, but because they fail to understand that fact they persist in injustice.

Oedipus blinds himself to similar effect. Other people will see a man who killed his father and married his mother, but he will not see them seeing. Oedipus is the final retort to Gyges and image for him to contemplate. You may come from the sheepherding countryside to kill the king and take his wife, as Gyges and Oedipus both do, but what makes your pride over this achievement possible is your failure to understand what you look like.

51 Daniel Mailick suggested this implication of the detail to me.

52 Plato *Republic* Book 2: justice, medicine, and exercise, 357b–d; Glaucon's examples, 360e–362c.

53 Plato *Republic* 10.612b4–5.

## Two ways of not seeing

The souls whose backs report their injustice are not being careless, as some souls are when choosing their next lives, or a reader overlooking what a word says. If anything it is the unjust who exercise the most scruples about running schemes and covering their tracks. When it comes to their souls' ruination though they look the other way, and finally and as a result they head to hell still looking in the wrong direction.

Both conceptions of wrong vision go by quickly in the myth, and this opposition between the two passages might seem like overreadings of passing remarks, except that the story's different parts *require* vision to fail differently in the two cases, once through inattention to what is right there being looked at, another time through looking – however attentively – in the wrong direction. Those who choose unhappy lives choose despite possessing the power to choose otherwise. Those who come to the end of an unjust life necessarily fail to see the grounds for judgment against them.

When souls are choosing the life they'll go into, the myth takes pains to say that gods are blameless. To those born, it denies the defense or excuse that a capricious fate located them in the lives they endure. "You chose this life; it could not have been perfect; but if it is thoroughly flawed or vicious you have only your choosing to blame." Otherwise we return to the god-blaming for which the *Republic* censured poets.[54] To insulate gods from responsibility, the underworld has to make every assignment of a life an informed choice, or one that could have been informed. What souls need to know about their lives ahead must be available to all of them, even if blameworthy haste and poor judgment prevent some from making the best use they can of available information. Or really, the myth wants to say, their haste and poor judgment – being blameworthy – show that the souls lacked something other than information. If the life-pattern is a biography you ought to read it through to the end; if an epitaph, you ought to deduce what state of character would have produced the events reported on this stone; if a constellation, you ought to see how the stars join to outline a figure.

At the same time that a soul's refusal to look more closely – despite the ability to see – justifies the punishment it will later receive, its inability to see (as when marching down leftwards to hell) accounts for its commission of crimes. This blindness is morally necessary, as the informed nature of life-selection had been. The soul's blindness defends Platonic philosophy against the empirical objection "Wicked people go unpunished." The *Republic*'s psychological theory reimagines vice as a furious incapacity for happiness. Yet there is no denying that such unhappiness continues to exist and even seeks to preserve itself. You can call it misery if you like but it feels like happiness. It follows that the vicious do not merely fail to notice their own misery but could

54 Plato *Republic* 2.379a–c.

not see it if they looked, or more accurately if they did to themselves in their benighted condition what they consider looking.

Missing a monumental unhappiness could not amount to having overlooked some clue, as sloppy souls did when mischoosing a life. That would mock the idea of calling it *great* unhappiness. Failing to see happiness seems to consist in lacking the capacity for the experience. The corrupting disease that is vice brings about (among other symptoms) numbness in the faculty of perceiving the disease that is vice. It is moral anosognosia. Whereas coming voluntarily into an undesirable life presumes comprehension about the other options available, living unjustly requires and at the same time abets an incomprehension about themselves that permits the unjust to believe no one sees their wickedness. They are hidden in the sense that children hide when they cover their eyes – dogs hide that way too – not unseen but only unseeing.

Within the *Republic*, sightlessness worse than careless looking sometimes prevents one's perceiving souls at large. Socrates wants to represent the unjust soul's diseased nature to one who proposes (as Glaucon did) that injustice brings advantages.[55] So he translates his analysis of soul into the picture of a hybrid beast, part human and part lion and part many-headed monster. Imagine these innards sheathed by a single coherent appearance of a human, "so that to the one who lacks the power to see the things within [*ta entos horan*], but only sees the outside, it appears to be one animal, a human."[56]

We understand that the unjust most of all lack the power to see things within. This is the blindness in themselves that they misunderstand as invisibility of the soul. A good judge of souls (Socrates already said) sees through the externalities that deceive other observers into thinking that tyrannical types are happy, accomplished, and worth envying.[57] Even earlier than that, Socrates says an evil man cannot recognize a healthy *êthos* "character" at all. The state of soul that determines a life's happiness can only be assessed by the right judges.[58]

## Metaphorical vision in the *Republic*

Vision has something open about it, and subject to negotiation, from the start of the *Republic*'s argument, in the moment that Glaucon asks Socrates to show if he can that one might prize justice as such, apart from seeking the consequences it brings, which is how we prize *horan*, *phronein*, and *hugiainein* "seeing; thinking; being healthy."[59] Being just will feel unwelcome unless

55 Plato *Republic* 9.588b; also see 588e–589a.

56 Plato *Republic* Book 9: image of soul, 588c–d; appears like one human, 588d.

57 Plato *Republic* 9.577a4.

58 Plato *Republic*: good judge of souls, 9.577a4; evil man can't recognize healthy character, 3.409d1. See Mailick (2018) for discussion of these passages.

59 Plato *Republic* 2.357c2–3.

Socrates can show it to be desirable as well as consequential, as those states and activities are. We want to be healthy, and not only because healthy people earn more money than sickly people.

Aristotle amplifying the same category of valuation will say we choose *to horan* "sight" even when not aiming to act.[60]

Glaucon is urging Socrates to show how human beings (surprisingly) might value, desire, and choose virtue as they already (obviously) value, desire, and choose something as familiar as vision. The rhetorical effectiveness of such a comparison depends on the familiarity of the thing being compared to. One item is known, in need of no explication; you compare the other item to that one to make its nature known too.

And yet the *Republic* is famous or notorious for reinterpreting the things it compares justice to. Socrates promises he will show where justice resembles thought, so that it turns out to gratify the just as thinking gratifies those who think. Then he reconstrues thought (*phronêsai*) as something "more divine" than other virtues, something therefore that lies beyond what Glaucon had had in mind.[61]

Similarly, justice as Socrates reveals it will resemble *hugiainein* "being healthy." Justice as "beauty and health of the soul" replaces old transactional ideas of justice in the *Republic*,[62] but only on the assumption that health and illness apply where they had previously been unsuspected. Indeed Socrates uses *hugiainen* to refer to a condition in which people recognize not merely beautiful and large objects but also the beautiful itself and the large itself.[63] Healthy human beings recognize the Forms. Justice *will* be like health, but a health you do not yet know.

Glaucon wants to find a justice that is desirable in itself. Socrates wants him to realize that he doesn't know "desirable in itself." Justice really resembles new thinking and a new kind of health. And so too perhaps the just life would lose its luster if it only wound up being like everyday eyesight, a dubiously useful thing prized only by nonphilosophers. To reinterpret justice and still have it resemble sight one must reinterpret sight.

## How to characterize the new sense of sight?

The *Republic*'s reinterpretation of sight does not mean simply the maneuver of using "see" as a metaphor for "know," although it includes that. One said

60 Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1.1 980a24–26.

61 Plato *Republic* 7.518e.

62 Plato *Republic* 4.444d–e; the phrase "beauty and health of the soul" comes from the summary of the *Republic*'s transformation of justice in Ferrari (2009, 123).

63 See Plato *Republic* 5.476e2. Considering what to say to the "lover of sights" Socrates asks whether "we shall have any way of soothing him and persuading him gently, concealing the fact that he is not healthy [*ouch hugiainei*]."

"I see" for "I know" before Plato and independent of philosophy, in many languages. Socrates does as much in the *Republic.* Inquiring into justice calls for sharp vision. What you assert is clear to a blind man, Socrates.[64]

But when Socrates speaks of "the eye of the soul," the expression subverts the cliché; for "the eye of the soul" is not one more idiom reflecting the similarity between vision and knowledge. It is a new coinage in Greek that (in the *Republic*) repudiates eyesight rather than enhancing its features.

The coinage leaves seeing ambiguous as failing to see is ambiguous in the myth of Er – which is a way of saying that the unclarity over how one fails to see does not arise only in the myth or only for the myth's purposes. We say "I see" to mean "I know" and so does Plato. With such sight, closer visual scrutiny leads to better knowledge. But the *Republic* also says "I see" to mean "I don't know." Given such sight, all the eyes in the world won't discover what they need.

The *Republic* does recognize learning by looking, as the children of potters learn, and guardians' children watching battles. Socrates treats intellection as the continuation of vision by other means in a much-studied passage from Book 7. That this thing is a finger one sees by looking. Fingers do not mislead the eyes. But whether the ring finger is long or short, the eyes can't tell. It lies between the longer middle finger and the diminutive pinky. The soul has to join the discussion with its understanding of what *megethos* "magnitude" really is. "For the sake of clarification of large and small, the intellect is compelled to see them [*idein*] not conjoined but distinguished," Socrates says. Where the eyes see confusingly long and short jumbled together the mind comes in for a closer disambiguating look.[65]

The soul does not reject the report from the eyes but supplements it: in the obvious sense, because it accepts the description of the thing as a finger and seeks to explain its characteristics; but even with respect to the finger's properties, because perception reports the thing as being both hard and soft, heavy and light. The perceptual communications call for *episkepsis* "review, inspection, investigation," as Glaucon puts it. Literal eyesight, seeking a superior version of itself, calls on the soul to see the finger better. The soul takes up and completes the task of the eye.[66]

Other passages in the same spirit praise the eye as the sense organ "most in the form of the sun" and sight as "costliest" for the creator to make. The

64 Plato *Republic*: sharp vision, 2.368c; clear to a blind man, 5.465d. This latter line, though voiced as an ordinary idiom, threatens to cut the other way. What you say, Socrates, is easy to "see" for those who do not rely on their sense of sight. I owe this observation to I-Kai Jeng.

65 Plato *Republic*: children of potters, 5.467a4–5; watching battles, 5.467c4; this is a finger, 7.523d1; ambiguous length of finger, 7.523e; what magnitude is, 7.523e; "intellect compelled to see them distinguished," 7.524c5–7.

66 Plato *Republic*: both heavy and light, etc., 7.524a; *episkepsis*, 7.524b2.

*Timaeus* will go so far as to make vision an ethical tool: Contemplating the night sky's great motions helps to direct the motions in the soul.[67]

In Er's story, the soul that grabs up the life of a tyrant arrives at that choice by virtue of *ou panta hikanôs anaskepsamenon* "not having looked sufficiently," in other words not doing more of the looking it was able to do. (The root *skeps-* names investigation or close regard.) That doomed soul then discovered its folly *kata scholê skepsasthai* "after having examined [the life] at leisure," looking further, carrying out the inspection or review, or *episkepsis,* that Glaucon associates with a closer look at the ambiguous finger.[68]

Fritz-Gregor Herrmann generalizes from such passages to describe the philosopher's contemplation of Forms, in Plato, as a repetition or intensification of, or an extrapolation from, the way nonphilosophers take in bodily beauty. On Herrmann's reading, philosophy understands the nonphilosopher to be passive before the sight of bodily beauty. Then, when approaching Forms, philosophers become subject to the same passivity, the result of their "viewing" the Forms.[69] In the allegory of the cave for instance "the vision of the things themselves and of the sun is purely passive: what can be known is fixed, and human beings are subject to what they see."[70]

## "The soul's eye"

But the *Republic* can also repudiate the senses and propose that one think without them, or against them. In those moments the soul possesses a rival sight of its own.

Owing to the imprecision involved in dating ancient documents – not to mention the possibility that a phrase occurred in some earlier work now lost – it is impossible to say for certain who first spoke of "the mind's eye." The sophist Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen* contains the line *tois tês doxês ommasin* "to [or: according to] the eyes of opinion." But then Plato uses the figure in several dialogues, in which we find *dianoias opsis* "intellectual vision," *tês psuchês ommata* "eyes of the soul," and – in the *Republic*, the phrase now of interest to us – "when the eye of the soul [*to tês psuchês omma*] is buried in barbarous filth, dialectic gently drags and leads it upward."[71]

The "intellectual vision" phrase in the *Symposium* contrasts a soul's vision with an eye's instead of making them continuous. The latter dims with age, the

67 Plato *Republic* Book 6: eyemost heliomorphic, 508b; seeing the most expensive sense, 507c. On sight and beauty recall *Phaedrus* 250d; and see *Cratylus* 399c for etymology of *anthrôpos* "human" as one who looks up. Ethical alignment, *Timaeus* 47b–c.

68 Plato *Republic* Book 10: soul didn't look sufficiently, 619b7–8; after reviewing at leisure, 619c2. I justify associating these words with Book 7's *episkepsis* because of the *skept-* root in each verb form.

69 Herrmann (2013).

70 Herrmann (2013, 296).

71 Gorgias *Encomium of Helen* 13; Plato: intellectual vision, *Symposium* 219a2; eyes of soul, *Sophist* 254a7–8; "when the eye …," *Republic* 7.533d1–3 (Blundell et al. 2013, 11–12).

former sharpens. And in general what is identified as inner vision seems not to advance the eyes' work but contrarily to render eyes irrelevant or misguided. The force of the Platonic figure comes close to what Medea says, in the tragedy by Euripides named after her:

> *dikê gar ouk enest en ophthalmois brotôn*
> there is no justice in mortals' eyes.[72]

The *Republic*'s thought of soul-eyes buried in filth introduces a particular essential feature of how those figurative eyes come to know, which is not by advancing forward with the body's eyes and past them, but changing course. Dialectic lifts up the eye of the soul. In other contexts it twists or turns around or reverses itself. It looks the other way. The practitioners of geometry who make the first step (on the divided line) from visible to intelligible objects use "visible" forms when they study squares and diagonals, "but not attending to" those sights. They look at geometrical diagrams but their minds are elsewhere, and so are their minds' eyes. The geometers seek *ekeina idein ha ouk an allôs idoi tis ê têi dianoiai* "to see those things that one could not see otherwise than by the use of thought."[73] The mathematicians' progress consists in denying rather than enhancing what the literal eyes do.

The repudiation of vision becomes a turn or turning away from vision when Socrates describes the cave. *Pace* Herrmann, Plato does not make the act of coming to know passive. If seeing implies acceptance of what exists independent of the seer and hence is passive, nevertheless putting yourself in the position to see takes an active change. The freed prisoners are made to *periagein* "turn" their heads to see a greater reality than that of the shadows they had busied themselves with. Their act of turning transforms the possibilities of what they will see. The greater reality will overwhelm a prisoner, who subsequently *apostrophomenon* "turning back" seeks to return to the state of just looking (passively). But when the rescue has gone well, Socrates says the prisoner *periestrepheto* "was turned around, converted" to the truth.[74]

Speaking in general of philosophical enlightenment, Socrates distinguishes the putative education that stuffs information into students from the type that turns the eye of the soul toward previously unseen realities. Certain subjects "necessitate the soul to be twisted around [*metastrephesthai*]" toward the place in which the finest being resides. We want our students *anaklinantas* "tilting upward" the vision of their souls.[75]

72 Euripides *Medea* 219.

73 Plato *Republic* 6: visible forms, 510d3; "not attending to" diagrams, 510d5–7; "to see those things," 511a1.

74 Plato *Republic* 7: "turn" heads, 515c7; "turning back," 515e3; "was turned around," 519b2.

75 Plato *Republic* 7: education that turns the soul's eye, 518c7–8; "twisted around," 526e2–4; "tilting upward," 540a5.

In these mentions of a turn and redirection of the soul's vision, the guiding thought is that insight will not emerge from eyesight. Philosophical knowledge does not follow from the thinking that does more of what the eyes had begun to do. Looking more closely will not accomplish epistemological progress, any more than the souls in Hades marching down to be punished could recognize their own injustice if only they undertook a more sustained version of the looking they were already doing. More careful scrutiny can never become a look in the opposite direction.

Herrmann, whose treatment is essential to understanding vision in the *Republic*, tallies up references to sight and light in the allegory of the cave and concludes: "Within any given section of the passage, these words are used both literally and metaphorically/metonymically."[76] What counts on an approach like this is that language evoking eyes, seeing, and light betrays Plato's reliance on vision-thinking.

My point on the contrary is that when Plato has the mind's eye turn away from the direction that the literal eye had been pointed in, eyesight takes on a bad valence. Literal vision goes from neutral process, albeit one that can be imperfect or incomplete, to an operation inclining toward error. If the eyes' seeing is to be turned away from, and then gets turned back to in a backsliding moment, literal sight implies not knowledge nor even the promise of knowledge found in opinion, but the threat of ignorance.

Here with all due respect to Herrmann, I take exception to the category "metaphorically/metonymically" to which he assigns nonliteral mentions of vision. Those words spliced together refer in tandem to a passage's figurative language; but when it comes to the eyes and vision in the *Republic*, metaphor and metonym lead in opposite directions. Vision provides a metaphor for knowledge in Plato, as it does broadly in Greek (where *oida* "I know" derives its root from *eidon* "I have seen") and likewise in English in too many ways to catalog. The *Republic* even justifies the metaphor in Book 6, when Socrates compares the sun to the Good, light to truth, and seeing to knowing.[77] The elaborateness of the analogy shows how similarly the two activities work. Where there is resemblance we have the grounds for using one word metaphorically to mean the other.

The extended analogy in Book 6 illustrates something else about metaphors, that they invite an expansion from the original resemblance. Ted Cohen calls this "a metaphor's capacity to suggest other, related metaphors, almost by implication." Cohen's example "If Miles Davis is the Picasso of jazz, then who is the Rembrandt of jazz?" finds its match in Socrates' query in the *Republic*: If knowing is the soul's seeing, then what is the soul's illuminating light, and what would the soul's sun be?[78]

76 Herrmann (2013, 294).
77 Plato *Republic* 6.508a–c.
78 Cohen (2008, 4).

The figure of speech called metonymy does not assert similarity, however, and does not expand into larger similarities. If a race is called a marathon, originally because of a region where *marathon* "fennel" grew (26 miles from Athens), I do not ask and I'd have no way of guessing what an artichoke race would be. So typically one could have a dictionary of metonyms as one could not have for metaphors. And what makes eyesight an unstable figure in the *Republic* is that it sometimes resembles knowledge, therefore offering a metaphor for knowledge; sometimes invokes the other senses and represents along with the collected senses an impulse or temptation away from knowing.

Thus when Socrates asks which 30-year-olds in the new city will be able to let go of *ommatôn kai tês allês aisthêseôs* "the eyes and the rest of sense,"[79] the visual organs thanks to their association or contiguity with other senses stand for error-bent perception as such. The eyes do not have to resemble the ears or the nose. They all join in representing ignorance. More accurately The eyes stand in for all the senses insofar as the senses are bodily, and so the eyes stand for the body.

Rather than express a single thought in divergent ways, metaphor and metonym register two divergent thoughts here. As an image or likeness of knowing and therefore its metaphor, seeing may be encouraged. It aligns with the actions of the soul. As the partner of ignorants like tasting and touching, seeing will have to be undone as the body's work generally must be. As metaphorical knowledge, eyesight is enhanced or intensified to approach knowledge. If the eye is the body on the other hand (being as it is *in* the body) nothing follows about the character of the perceptions it takes in. *Qua* soul or soul-likeness the eye does something like knowing; *qua* body it is that which does not know, and its seeing is the failure to know.

## The error of looking in the wrong direction

The unjust soul scourged to its dungeon, but also souls in general, are the *Republic*'s examples of what must be seen from the correct perspective or else will not be seen at all; the human inner life not glimpsed partially by the eyes but misunderstood altogether.

Another example arises when the *Republic* understands astronomy as knowledge for which visual perception is to be turned from not improved upon. How do we assert the starry heavens to be "above"? That question arises in Book 7, during a survey of the curriculum to be taught to the new city's rulers, when Socrates has to correct Glaucon's way of thinking. The philosopher–rulers will study astronomy, Socrates says, and first Glaucon agrees on practical grounds. They will need to calculate months and seasons. Socrates sets him straight. The new city's schools will not promote vulgar utility.[80] So they turn back to this curricular item with Glaucon's regret that

79 Plato *Republic*7.537d.

80 Plato *Republic* 7: calculate months 527d; no vulgar utility, 527d–528a.

he praised astronomy *phortikôs* "coarsely, in common terms." Now he will use philosophical language, for it is clear, he says, that astronomy "compels the soul to look upward."[81]

Socrates corrects him again, as he sometimes recorrects interlocutors when they catch one error only to fall into another. Looking up to the stars with eyes will *not* lead upward to philosophy. The "study of the things above" means something different. Glaucon as if still thinking with the prisoners in the cave has failed to distinguish his up from his "up." His astronomy might as well be a hole in the ground. "I [Socrates speaking] am incapable of judging any other thing to make the soul look up except the one that would be about being and the invisible." The new looking differs so thoroughly from old-school looking that it attends to objects the eye would judge to be no objects at all. It looks at what is *aoraton* "invisible," not at the object of sight.[82]

The stars function in this exchange as geometrical drawings do in the divided line. They embody patterns of motion to be identified and studied and nothing visible. The realities that a true astronomer investigates do not twinkle, so looking very closely at twinkling objects can impede a philosopher's development. Stargazing in that sense overvalues what are in the end only more examples of matter – longer-lasting and less changeable ones than the material things on earth, but still of a lower order than the invisible sights are.

Socrates labors the point, and the point is that he needs to. Metaphors mislead. Eyesight is such a convenient metaphor for knowledge that it can trick nonphilosophers into believing that seeing constitutes knowing. Socrates says that the right subjects in school will "purify and revive" that organ of the soul that is worthier of preserving than 10,000 eyes, the organ by means of which *alêtheia horatai* "truth is seen"; but really any number used for eyes would underestimate the difference between the incommensurable ways of seeing.[83]

Further demonstrating that he is now treating sight as metonym for error-prone sense perception not metaphor for knowledge, Socrates considers harmonics as aural parallel to astronomy. Students should not study music experientially, straining to hear subtle wavers in tones, but as philosophers do, mindful of the proportions that underlie musical intervals. Better auditory experience will not teach harmony; that requires "listening away."

81 Plato *Republic* 7: regret, 528e5–6; soul compelled to look up, 529a2.

82 Plato *Republic* 7: looking lead up, 529a–b; "study of things above," 529a9–10; "I am incapable," 529b4–6.

83 Plato *Republic* 7.527d–e. On the order of magnitude 10,000, see the allegory of the cave, and Socrates' promise that returning escapees will see that much better than people there: 7.520c. Assigning any number for the difference might seem to defeat the thought that items are incommensurable, given that a number enables measurement; but *murias* "10,000" was used to imply uncountably many: Euripides *Phoenissae* 830.

The *Republic* tends to disparage hearing. Bad ideas and stories about death are things young people have heard, as are the names given to the underworld.[84] Sounds seem to bring malign influences through the ears as if through doors carelessly left open. Even Socrates is susceptible when Thrasymachus pours his speech "into our ears."[85] The ears are nearly inorganic, for music comes through them as if through a "funnel."[86] For education to turn philosophers away from eye and ear alike indicates the distance between this passage and what Socrates was saying about vision when he set it apart from the other senses to resemble knowledge.[87]

Again in the myth of Er, when the souls purified by a millennium of death gather before choosing their next lives, they see the orbital paths of the stars and planets and hear pure tones fitting the ratios of those orbits.[88] The whorls on a spindle give those disembodied eyes the night sky without the twinkle; the Sirens give the ears of their souls the proportions of music without the distracting tunes and chords.

These souls taking in harmonics and astronomy the right way have achieved the epistemological turnaround that embodied souls need to take pains to learn. These are pure souls after all no longer attracted to bodily sense impressions. That some of these souls will soon make unwise choices for their next life-terms only show that they are able to detect their coming vices but not conscientious enough to avoid them.

## The *paradeigma* of the city

The thing most worth seeing is the new city of the philosophers. This too swims into view for those who have oriented or turned themselves to see it. For Socrates offers something like a glimpse of the city when he rounds off the principal long argument of the *Republic.* "Maybe [*isôs*] in heaven there is a pattern [*paradeigma*] laid up for the one who wishes to look [*boulomenôi horan*] and, by looking [*horôntí*], to found it in himself." In similar language, though without reference to the stars and sky, Socrates had told Glaucon earlier, *anablepe* "look away" – away from the present state of affairs and toward the hypothesized new city.[89]

The city as hope and aspiration combines the stars above and soul within. Up in the sky and setting a good example this *paradeigma* seems even more clearly a constellation than the *paradeigmata* of lives were in the myth

84 In Book 2 for instance *legomen* "we tell" children stories, 377a3–4; what children may *akouein* "hear," 377b6 (and see 378b2); in Book 3, see 386a1 on hearing, and 387b2; the underworld names Cocutos and Styx, 387b–c, names that shake up all those who hear them.

85 Plato *Republic* 1.344d1–2. Compare Glaucon on being talked deaf by Thrasymachus, 2.358c8.

86 Plato *Republic* 3.411a6.

87 See Socrates' reference to the uniqueness of sight in this regard: Plato *Republic* 6.507c–e.

88 Plato *Republic* 10.616c–617b.

89 Plato *Republic*: "maybe in heaven," 9.592b1–2; "look away," 4.431b4.

of Er. Meanwhile the example that this order sets can bring about a healthy constitution in the soul. Contemplating the stellar pattern, assuming that you know how to see beyond the spray of lights that gratify everyone else, helps to make it a guide to your own psychic balance. The faultlessness is in our stars first, then in our selves.

Socrates made it clear that only trained philosophers would know the right way to look at the stars. Here in Book 9, only a few Stephanus pages before imagining the city-pattern above, he spelled out his image of the soul's forces within, none of which the incapable observer will see. It will take some exceptional turning to look before one sees the new city.

## The sight of women at the gymnasium

Why distinguish in two ways rather than one (as this chapter has been doing) between visual perception and philosophical thinking? Why should there be – why should we think that the *Republic* takes there to be – a difference between looking more closely and looking the other way? It is true that in both cases the philosopher achieves a comprehension superior to perception. And one who presses that question might accuse me of having taken two figures of speech too much to heart. One "sees" (so the reply goes) thanks to dialectic as one cannot hope to see with eyes. Taking the different images for this distinction as images of different distinctions only proves the danger of speaking figuratively in the first place.

I believe there needs to be a substantive difference because philosophy orients itself differently, in the two cases, to nonphilosophical thinking. Where thought fails to attain philosophy's level through laziness or inattention, philosophy presents itself as a more sustained and serious version of what human beings do already. Here we understand philosophy as rationality. Philosophers differ from other people in degree, but like human beings as such they are characterized by their faculties of reason.

By comparison, where thought goes wrong because it has been pointing in the wrong direction all along, philosophy becomes another kind of knowledge, roughly what we'd call today a different discipline. Still rational, philosophy also becomes a form of expertise. Where on the other model you'd make a decent intelligent person into a philosopher saying "Do more of what you are already doing," on this model you would begin the training with the words "Stop what you're doing." You have relied on your sight, and philosophy calls for other faculties. Epistemically speaking, but also ethically and politically speaking, the two conceptions of philosophy leave it differently related to other human beings and with different tasks to accomplish.

A passage that proves the *Republic* mobilizes the two figures of speech differently appears in Book 5, in a page that places the city in the lines of sight while simultaneously identifying vision as the impediment to a new society. And in the congested logic with which Socrates reasons there – in what makes

the logic congested – we find two distinct ways at work of how one might fail to see.[90]

Socrates has begun depicting life under the proposed constitution. The equal participation of men and women in the guardian class leads him to consider how they will train for military service. As most Greek cities did, Athens had open-air gymnasia for its citizens to exercise in. As in other cities the gymnasia permitted only men to enter. They exercised naked there, whence the word *gumnasion* from *gumnos* "naked." Mixing the genders in the city's ruling classes will change all that, for as Socrates says they will now have to have men and women together exercising naked.[91]

No doubt people will laugh, most of all when they see the *old* women strip and sweat. But remember (Socrates says) that people laughed when Athenian men first adopted the Spartan and Cretan custom of naked exercise. And then they stopped laughing. We can expect them to stop again.[92]

Living in the modern present and inured to fashion changes, we risk assuming that we grasp why people stopped laughing. Short skirts look funny until people get used to them; then there is something funny-looking about long skirts, but again people adjust. The public's endless acclimation to new modes of dress makes fashion possible, so we figure that Socrates noticed the same acclimation back in antiquity.

It might even be natural for one suspicious of democracy, as Socrates is, to remark on the powers that fashion possesses, in the same spirit in which we often hear serious intellectuals pooh-poohing a new practice or theory as a "fashion."[93]

Socrates has a different point to make, not the point that people get used to change. He says that when some men stripped to exercise the day arrived when *ephanê* "it appeared, seemed, looked" that it was better to exercise naked than to *sugkaluptein* "cover, veil, or hide" such things. Naked exercise was not merely new but new and improved: *ameinon* "better," he says. Because it was better in reality to uncover the body, the humorousness of the appearance had to be set aside. Nudity was funny only *en tois ophthalmois* "to the eyes." In a truer respect shameful behavior is the only *opsis* "sight, spectacle" that deserves to be responded to with laughter.[94]

When Socrates calls it better to unveil the body, he must mean that it is better for the body to be seen. In antiquity one dominant justification for

90 The following pages began as part of Pappas (2015b).

91 Plato *Republic* 5.452a.

92 Plato *Republic* 5.452: proposal sounds ridiculous, a5; especially regarding *old* women, b2–3; people laughed at the Spartan and Cretan male nudity, c6–d1; stopped laughing, d5–7.

93 How far fashion-thinking may be said to operate in the ancient world, and where the concept of fashion fails to apply, is a principal subject of Pappas (2015a).

94 Plato *Republic* 5.452d: it "appeared" that it was better not to "cover, veil, or hide," 4–5; naked exercise *better*, 3; nudity only funny "to the eyes," 5; bad behavior the only ridiculous sight, 6–8.

athletic nudity was that it permitted the complete inspection of the body, as in the tradition that the Spartans used to inspect their male population during public workouts, or as in a tale about trainers at the Olympics stripping to prove that they were men.[95]

The *Republic* extends the ideal of transparency to all aspects of the guardians' lives. Their living area inside the city is visible to every other citizen. Anyone who wants to can enter their quarters. Their children watch battles to see how wars are fought. And what is *not* seen implies injustice and perversion. Thus when infants are born to undeserving warriors the rulers *katakrupsousin* "hide them away."[96]

Appreciating the argument steers us toward its central difficulty, the reason I spoke of a congested logic at work. The argument requires on the one hand that the body be available to the eye as object of knowledge; but also that the eye that knows not be available to the ignorant body it belongs to. As a result the perception of the body must occur in the soul and not through the body.

When male nudity came to Athens, the Athenians originally responded with nothing better than a look, and they laughed at the Spartan practice they saw. Then they troubled themselves to *look* in that other way, and they *saw* (in that other way), for it appeared, that nudity was better. "Seeing" is the name for knowing that those who exercise should strip. It is also the diagnosis for a failure to know. It is the illness of which it is the cure.

The collision between the two valuations of sight might occur here because the possibility of women's exercising (and ruling) in the new city both depends on the reality of human bodies and tries to transform that reality. In that case the oppositely inclining ideas of sight will find no easy reconciliation.

Vision is a metaphor for knowledge when we pursue transparency among the ruling class. Sight resembles knowledge, so that to see is to begin to know, and the Athenians stopped laughing when they did with their rational faculties something resembling what they did with their eyes. And yet those same eyes as instances of the bodily senses (synecdoches for the body) mislead a reasoning soul. At that point they need to be turned away from.

Socrates is heading toward a larger conclusion about the equality of men and women. He wants to know how the people in the city to come will perceive that city – as natural and better, or as something ridiculous? The threat of laughter in the gymnasium gives concrete expression to the worry of how the rulers will generate consent for the city's constitution. A possible change in how citizens see thus speaks to the problem that Rachana Kamtekar raises

95 Inspection of Spartans, Aelian *Varia Historia* 14.7; of trainers, Pausanias *Description of Greece* 5.6.7–8. The essential discussion of Greek athletic nudity is Bonfante (1989); also see Arieti (1975); Golden (1998); Mouratidis (1985). On the *Republic* passage's claim about when nudity entered Athenian gymnastic practice, see McDonnell (1991).

96 Plato *Republic*: barracks open, 3.416d; young watch battles, 5.466e, 5.467e; faulty births hidden, 5.460c. Ophir (1991) explores this theme and points out its significance to the *Republic*'s thought.

about consent and concord in the *Republic*'s city, in "What's the Good of Agreeing?"[97] The answer regarding the city might depend (as it does at the gymnasium) on what kinds of eyes are looking. An Athenian seeing the *Republic*'s plans for a new constitution might laugh. That shows that they are relying on their eyes. But they will see where the city's greater value lies and that the new constitution is better. Where they once looked, they will – what should we call it?

At this point, with the city's possibility at issue again, I turn back to the myth of Er. To the degree that this myth offers a prophecy about the earth in future days, as I would say it is better situated to do than any other part of the *Republic*, it too invites the question whether that will be a world in which one sees the new city.

## The myth of Er and the future

Socrates called Homer the progenitor of tragedy, earlier in Book 10, as Aristotle will essentially do in the *Poetics,* and Aeschylus worshipfully in the description (attributed to him much later) of Athenian tragedies as "slices from Homer's banquet."[98] So this tale that Socrates distinguishes from the *Odyssey*'s report on the underworld should also stand opposed to tragedy.

The *Republic* took poets to task for representing great heroes treating death as terrible. It has long been observed that the myth of Er contains terrors of its own. The ten centuries of torture awaiting unjust souls will induce anyone who might be grouped with them to avoid death at all costs.[99] The punishments after death will befall people justly, so the myth does not simply reprise what it condemns in tragedy; it differs in other particulars too, reporting on the other world in nearly a monologue and so avoiding the mimetic presentation of characters that Socrates found problematic.

Even considering the particular differentiations, the first part of the myth contains no contrast with tragedy that compares to its closing scene. The souls choose their next lives; and (as Stephen Halliwell writes) "we know of tragic dramas either named after or involving every one of the characters mentioned … with the possible exception of Thersites."[100] One might specially recall the *Ajax* of Sophocles, whose maddened hero attacks sheep mistaking them for men; does his transformation into a lion (presumably a sheep-eater) allude to that scene? But Athenian tragedies spoke of the judgment that awaited

97 Kamtekar (2004). I connect her concerns with the example of women exercising in Pappas (2015b).

98 Homer and tragedy: Plato *Republic* 595c; Aristotle *Poetics* 4 1448b39–1449a1; "slices," Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 8.347.

99 Poets representing fear of death, Plato *Republic* 3.386a–388d. On the myth's own culpability in making death frightful, see Halliwell (1988, 175) citing Colotes the Epicurean, who lived less than a century after Plato.

100 Halliwell (1988, 189).

the dead, as the *Odyssey* and other poems did; not of their passage to a new life ahead.[101]

The myth's legacy plays up its orientation toward future history. Though no proof of how Plato wanted the story read, that legacy shows what ancient audiences found in it. On one side (maybe as transmitted through the "dream of Scipio" with which Cicero concludes his *Res Publica*), the myth of Er belongs among texts that resemble apocalyptic writings.[102] Lucian's *True History*, a very different kind of late-ancient work, conjures up the myth of Er in its final episode set on the Isles of the Blest (with participation by Socrates and a nod to Plato's offstage presence). *True History* also contains a trip to the moon and battles against aliens, thanks to which it is often classified as early science fiction, even as the first work of science fiction.[103] But the affinities between Lucian's invention and modern science fiction also draw the myth of Er into the same domain. *True History* grounds science fiction in tales of the afterlife, turning the place that everyone's soul will go after dying into the coming version of *this* place, or this place as it will be after your own death. When I alluded earlier to the science–fictional nature of the story's look out over the solar system, I was citing only the most literal affinity between the genres.

As a genre sometimes judged to be incompatible with tragedy, science fiction communicates possibilities that violate tragedy's finality.[104] Where Athenian tragedy presented spectators with heroes and incidents from the long-gone (therefore as we might surmise unchangeable) Homeric past, science fiction shares with apocalyptic writings a commitment to narratives about the future. Whether divinely engineered or achieved by human effort, the future's world addresses the same desire for continued existence, but also for final justice and maybe relief from suffering, that projections into the afterlife speak of. Hence what Louis Gernet called "the deep identity … between the depiction of the land of the gods, the Land of the Dead, the land of miraculous fruit, and also, naturally, the Golden age." As the after-existence of the Er story in science fiction and apocalypse do, Gernet shows how the myths in Plato's dialogues speak of the future,[105] where that means something more global than an individual otherworldly future.

The projective character of the myth again distinguishes it from the report to Alcinous and the *Odyssey*'s elegy to the ended age of heroes. Most

101 Edmonds (2004, 196–197). See Homer *Odyssey* 11.576 ff.; Pindar *Olympian Ode* 2.57–6; Aeschylus *Eumenides* 273–274; *Suppliants* 230–231. Segal (1978, 323) writes that the myth of Er "empties" epic heroism "of its tragic meaning."

102 On grouping the dream of Scipio and myth of Er with apocalyptic texts, see for example, Talbert (1994, 5–6).

103 Lucian of Samosata *True History*: trips to moon, battle against aliens, 1.11–19; Socrates, 2.17–23; Isle of the Blest, 2.6–26; Plato and *Republic* 2.17, 2.19 (and see Preface Section 4).

104 Thus Cavell (1979, 457) "Science fiction cannot house tragedy because in it human limitations can from the beginning be bypassed" – as one could surely also say about the myth of Er. For a contrasting take on fantastic literature, see Bloom (2004).

105 Gernet (1981): "deep identity," 115; Plato's myths, 116.

of the Trojan War's participants have died. Odysseus loses all his men and ships returning home; bards already sing of the war in palaces, as Homer will do centuries later but as no one except heroes themselves did during the heroic age's full flowering. Odysseus defers to the disappearance of that age when he calls Eurytus and Heracles the great archers he would not compare himself to.[106]

The voyage to Hades makes the same point brusquely. Achilles: dead. Agamemnon: dead. The phrase that became almost proverbial *kai mên eiseidon* "and then I saw" introduces one character after another as Odysseus recalls his visit: "And then I saw Sisyphus." "And then I saw Tantalus."[107] Even the heroism of Odysseus finds its conclusion here, to be followed by his life as an ordinary king; for Odysseus revivifies Tiresias and learns about his own future. After regaining his throne he will need to march deep inland to spread the worship of Poseidon. He will plant his oar, effectively burying his seaborne life in a sailor's cenotaph. Then he will rule into old age.[108] He will govern as kings do ordinarily, and as the age after the heroic age knew them to rule. The last adventure finishes the era of adventures.[109]

Compare Homer's underworld with Virgil's. Rather than lock the age of heroes away in Hades, Virgil uses its shades to foretell Roman heroism. He surrounds Aeneas with an underworld full of heroes waiting to be reborn (after a millennium) as Roman personages that Virgil's readers would recognize.[110]

Assuming a date around 725 – early but possible – for Homer's composition of the *Odyssey*, it precedes the *Republic* by three and a half centuries (given a year near 375 for the writing of the *Republic*), which is also the span of time between the *Republic* and the *Aeneid.* Bisecting the Homeric tradition that the *Aeneid* is drawing on, the myth of Er introduces the thought into that tradition that an epic goodbye to heroes might play a second role greeting a new heroic age. Virgil lets his reader imagine Rome's imperial present as the global future foreseen long before. Does Plato's myth likewise lend itself to depicting a heroic city's new birth? Will we live, as people do in some kinds of science fiction, in futuristic cities?

106 Homer *Odyssey*: bards like Phemius on Icaria, 1.325–344, Demodocus among Phaeacians, 8.1–89; compare the Trojan War, during which Achilles sings his own praise of heroes, *Iliad* 9.186–189; Odysseus on Eurytus and Heracles, *Odyssey* 8.221–226.

107 Homer *Odyssey*: Sisyphus, 11.593; Tantalus, 11.582. For quotations from this Homeric passage see Plato *Protagoras*, 315b–c, where Socrates uses "and then I saw" proverbially.

108 Homer *Odyssey* Book 11: prophecies of Tiresias, 90–137; walk inland, 121–122; oar into earth, 129; rule into old age, 134–135. David Schur pointed out to me that Odysseus's oar in the earth functions as sailor's cenotaph.

109 On the function of this story to foreclose other adventures featuring Odysseus, see Marks (2008, especially Chapter 4).

110 Virgil *Aeneid* Book 6: millennium in afterlife, 748; prediction of Roman personages, 756–892.

## The heroes' return

The timing just about works out, as far as Plato knew, to have Homer's characters return to life. The myth of Er puts a millennium between one's death and the soul's reincarnation, and the histories that Plato read estimated the Trojan War's date as something like a millennium in the past.[111] Plato's character Clinias, in the *Laws*, locates the legendary characters Daedalus, Orpheus, and Palamedes "a thousand or two thousand years" in the past,[112] evidence that for Plato millennial units are appropriate to the temporal placement of those past figures.

The myth of Er specifies how these people will return, many in animal form. Ajax chooses to live as a lion, Agamemnon as an eagle. But Odysseus and Epeius, his collaborator on the Trojan Horse, choose human lives. Atalanta will return as an athlete again, but male.[113] Lowell Edmonds has said that individual memory in ancient accounts of immortality compensates for the community's failure to remember[114]; this persistence, without personal memory, suggests a community in which the new arrival becomes again the remembered hero.

Parents who see in their child some powerful resemblance to a deceased ancestor take comfort in that resemblance. Something of the beloved ancestor is still around, with no hope that the child will recall having lived the ancestor's life.

The ancient Greeks saw legendary characters around them, or claimed to, even without believing in reincarnation. Pindar's epinician odes linked athletes of his time to heroes from the Trojan War. So does Platonic philosophy. In the *Apology,* speculating on what death might be, Socrates proclaims there would be no greater good than death as travel to another place.[115] The dead would meet the demigods who judge the dead, meet Homer and Hesiod and Orpheus,

111 Thucydides *Peloponnesian War*: Homer's birth long after Trojan War, 1.3.3; Samian tyrant Polycrates "many generations" after it, 1.14.1. Where Thucydides remains vague, Herodotus supplies numbers. Heracles was spoken of as preceding the Trojan War, and Herodotus says Pan was born after it; and he places them respectively nine and eight centuries before his time: Herodotus *Histories* 2.145.1. Say the Trojan War was fought 850 years before the appearance of the *Histories* in 440. That puts it 900 or so years before the writing of the *Republic.* Halliwell putting the date more precisely emphasizes that Plato's numbers are off (Halliwell 1988, 189–190). I suppose that I find the closeness of the numbers more significant than the degree of error.

112 Plato *Laws* 3.677d. Palamedes belonged to the Trojan War era. Orpheus is normally earlier, although the myth of Er shows him lining up to be reincarnated with the heroes of that same war. Daedalus is harder to pin down, but his associations with Minos place him before the Trojan campaign; and proverbial uses of his name in Homer – the *daidaleê* lyre of Achilles, *Iliad* 9.187; Hephaestus, *daidallôn* "cunningly working" Achilles' shield, 18.479 – imply his long-past existence.

113 Plato *Republic* Book 10.620b–c.

114 Edmonds (2004, 53–54).

115 Plato *Apology* 40e4–7.

and would meet all the figures of the campaign against Troy: Palamedes, Ajax, Agamemnon, Odysseus, Sisyphus.[116]

The dialogues imagine the figures from that past time as human archetypes. Call it "mythological role-playing." In the *Phaedrus* Socrates *kataskeuazei* "fashions" Gorgias as Nestor, Thrasymachus or Theodorus of Byzantium as Odysseus, as if to say that the people of their time could pass for their ancient paradigms. Hippias plays a Nestor-like peacemaker in the *Protagoras.* And in the *Symposium* Alcibiades says that ancient parallels exist for everyone of the present except the incomparable Socrates. Needless to say his compliment registers as praise for Socrates. For it to be worth mentioning that one lacks an antecedent from the Trojan War, *having* an antecedent must be a commonplace.[117]

Reincarnation turns simile into something like fact, and the fact explains the likeness, especially given the proviso from Socrates that souls choose futures continuous with their past. That proviso distinguishes the *Republic*'s reincarnation from the type associated with Pythagoras, who was said (by Plato's student Heraclides) to remember having lived as Euphorbus, the Trojan warrior who wounded Patroclus and was killed by Menelaus.[118]

Chapter 4 spoke of the noble lie's bringing the citizens of the new city into the wake of a mythic age. Therefore they can expect divine assistance for their city. But that story will be told with only the new city's inhabitants as its audience. The myth of Er goes out to everyone. It purports to have been true all along and everywhere. Now that the time has come for that original greatest generation to reenter bodily form, it raises the possibility that all humanity continues to live, or will soon live again, in a mythic age. The souls on the meadow of heaven, some of them anyway, may populate the *Republic*'s new city.[119]

## The last question

Is it grounds for hope that epic heroes are on their way back into the waking world, or a reason for despair that they will enter incognito? These are the

116 Plato *Apology* 41a–c.

117 Plato: *Phaedrus* 261b–c; *Protagoras* 337c–338a; *Symposium* 221c–d. The *Phaedrus* attributes emphasis on "confirmation" or "assurance" to this Theodorus (266e), who – coming from Byzantium – should not be confused with the Theodorus of Cyrene in Plato's *Theaetetus*. "Mythological role-playing," Morgan (2016, 156).

118 Report from Heraclides, Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 8.4; on Euphorbus see Homer *Iliad*: Euphorbus wounds Patroclus, 16.786–857; is killed by Menelaus, 17.9–109.

119 As Edmonds (2004, 146–149) has observed, the Hades in *Frogs* resembles aboveground Athens. By the same reasoning, Plato can populate his city antecedently in Hades, as Virgil will do with Rome. Sedley (2009) shows how the myth in Plato's *Gorgias* makes an allegory for the advent of Socratic thinking in Athens. Naturally we can't have the choice of a tyrant in the city.

Trojan War's people and other names out of mythology, and the story does say that they're returning to life. Yet the way they return can make reincarnation look like a reductio of utopian promise.

For example, Odysseus conceived the plan for building a big wooden horse and conquering Troy. He convinced Agamemnon, who ordered Epeius to hammer the thing together.[120] And then out of the stalemate of endless siege the Achaeans took the city. Do we prepare to reenact *that*? Picture a quiet man in private life – Odysseus reborn – pitching his idea to the eagle that reincarnates Agamemnon, who goes to a craftswoman (formerly Epeius) and commands her to execute the plan. It's a plan for a comedy – which is to say that it's not really a plan.

The joke was old before Plato was born. Xenophanes repeats a rumor about Pythagoras's commanding a man to stop beating a puppy. "It's my friend's soul, a human soul. I recognized it when I heard the bark."[121] Xenophanes told this anecdote to mock reincarnation, not to marvel at his fellow philosopher's sharp ear. Future philosophers with thoughts of founding a new order will find themselves in the same position.

And yet (to go back to the opposite reading) the *Republic* has constructed its account of how the earlier figures return. The thousand-year lag between death and rebirth comes close to fitting Plato's era's estimate of the time that had passed since the previous era. The souls choose new lives as continuations of the stories told about their old ones, by way of emphasizing that they do not merely illustrate the ethical imperative to choose thoughtfully. Fighters will still fight; thinkers will think. The myth is not just about individuals.

The *Republic* makes clear that the guardians will pattern their behavior after what they learn about anyone Homer called *hêrôs* "hero." The guardians will inherit the place and the social function of epic heroes. So there must be no bad images of heroes in poetry. And Socrates says that the young will be less strict with themselves if they believe that the heroes raped, or that they fall out with friends and relatives.[122]

In the *Timaeus* and *Critias* the good city is again governed and defended by epic-style warriors. How right, and how suited to one's hopes for a new city, that the myth of Er should see such warriors' souls returning. Maybe improbably funny, but still right. Or do we say, maybe right but improbably funny? Either the heroes' becoming ordinary humans and animals imply that there are no more heroes; or it implies that there will always be heroes identifiably like the old ones.

What about the philosophers who'll rule? You might even wonder whether a soul will choose the philosophical life.[123] But if a soul's ordering needs to be

120 Homer *Odyssey* 8.493–494, 11.523.

121 Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 8.36.

122 Plato *Republic*: general directive about heroes, 2.377d; the young less strict with themselves, 3.391d–e; falling out with friends, 2.378c.

123 Thus Ferrari (2009, 129). Christopher Raymond pressed this point when I spoke at Vassar, observing that a philosopher who chose to come back as a ruler would have to face the

inferred from the events in a life, it would seem that many life-narratives could contain an undetected philosophical soul. The soul that became Socrates would have chosen a stonecutter's life.[124] Atalanta's male athlete, Epeius's craftswoman, and certainly the private citizen who is the new Odysseus could all philosophize – Odysseus in particular, because he chooses a life that meets the *Republic*'s own definition of justice. It is as true about the myth of Er as Edmonds says of the myth in Plato's *Phaedo*, that Plato "move[s] the philosopher from the margins to the center."[125]

## What the philosopher sees

What does it mean that the alternative to a new population of heroes is a joke? Laughter comes from those who reject the philosophical order because they're looking in the wrong direction. The prospect of philosopher–kings sounds like a joke to inveterate nonphilosophers. You laugh at the thought of naked women exercising, hence at the equality of the sexes, because you rely on what is "funny to eyes." The prisoners still shackled laugh at the freed philosopher returning to the cave to help them because they are looking at wall shadows and don't know he has been in the light. Those who do not philosophize (or can't) laugh at those who do.[126]

This too has happened before, and again with a king – no ordinary king either but Theseus, the one who unified Attica's villages into a *polis*. An Athenian tradition held that Theseus was greeted with laughter when he first arrived in town.[127] Having grown up away from Athens, he came to the city wearing outdated clothing, a *chitôn* down to his feet. Only women dressed that way. Theseus's hair was even braided. So some men laughed, asking what nubile maiden this was who came wandering around alone.[128] Laughing at the reappearances that the myth of Er promises will put skeptics about the city

same reluctance that the *Republic* attributes to the good city's philosophers when required to govern: 7.519d–520e. As I replied to Raymond, the philosopher's preference not to rule does not necessitate refusal of life all things considered.

124 The stonecutting tradition about Socrates is not in Plato or Xenophon. See Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 2.19, which makes the claim about him and cites earlier sources. Yates (2017) develops a skeptical response.

125 Edmonds (2004, 230). On Odysseus choosing his new life philosophically hence living the philosopher's life, see Montiglio (2011, 48–52).

126 Plato *Republic*: philosopher–kings, 5.473c; funny to eyes, 5.452d3; prisoners laughing, 7.517d–518b. Mocking laughter in Plato is often unphilosophical: *Gorgias* 484d–e; *Phaedrus* 249d; *Theaetetus* 172c.

127 The dialogues speak of Theseus, without exception, as of a historical figure: *Critias* 110b; *Laws* 3.687e, 11.931b; *Phaedo* 58a. Socrates treats him as a hero at *Theaetetus* 169b; in the *Republic*, when he proposes censoring the stories that attribute rape to Theseus, it is out of respect for him as a hero: 3.391c.

128 Pausanias *Description of Greece* 1.19.1. Bacchylides 18, lines 53–54 provides a partial early confirmation of this tradition, speaking of Theseus in striking dress (Davie 1982, 26).

in the position of those early Athenians, the kind that don't recognize a ruler when they see one.

The reading of the *Republic* according to which we are *supposed* to laugh at the city has to answer the problem that people who laugh within Plato's dialogues are misunderstanding things. Their laughter comes out of their lying eyes.

For once the best answer to an open question might be that tired sagacity "It depends on how you look at it." More correctly: "It depends on how (well) you see." The myth of Er may promise to send heroes back to earth, where we trust philosophers to spot them, just as the city's philosophers will spot the silver and gold in citizens. The philosopher reads people as no one else has ever done, and will know which returning souls to bring together and refashion into philosophers and join with in founding the new city. The philosopher "can see little and see big, as no others can," as Ferrari puts it; "this qualifies him to rule those others."[129] Philosophers in the city will see their fellow citizens' souls and bring them together to create a new order.

Precisely where it invites comparisons to science fiction and apocalypse, the myth of Er foregrounds the problem of knowledge. This is a side effect of Plato's forcing a tale of death to speak of future births. We wonder how to see the future. Politically this means looking into the living and grasping what future order they might belong to. One or both of the kinds of sight that the myth of Er prizes is the philosophical reader's expert sight. Ultimately, what justifies asking the myth of Er about the city is that the importance the myth grants to what philosophers do is the same thing the noble lie claims the founding rulers will do.[130]

What about nonphilosophers' perceptions? In this respect, *how* one fails to see informs the city-founding philosopher's role. Have nonphilosophers mostly neglected looking closely? If the ability to see souls fails by reason of insufficient attentiveness, so that philosophy takes the perceptions that are available to all and perfects the way one reasons on that basis – if today's philosophers might function as an avant-garde – then the existing philosopher has a political task to perform in the city as it exists. "Look more closely. The city is coming." The public may start out laughing, as they laugh about philosopher–kings, but they come to see the merits of the new constitution.[131]

Socrates says: Er says: The souls as they chose their new lives were a spectacle that he found *eleinên* "pitiable" and *geloian* "ridiculous, risible" and *thaumasian* "wondrous, marvelous."[132] All three at once? Perhaps so, and

129 Ferrari (2005, 115–116).

130 In this connection see the reading of the myth by Fulvia de Luise, who equates the skill that souls need for entering a good life with the justice a philosopher needs in governing the city (de Luise 2007: 337, 360–361).

131 Socrates predicts a "wave of laughter" in response to his proposal that philosophers govern: 5.473c6.

132 Plato *Republic* 10.620a1–2. I am struck by the fact that Gonzalez (2012, 259) refers to this passage with the words "pitiful, comic, and bewildering," the first two adjective

depending who is looking. Picture these souls' arrivals in their new bodies and a philosopher's observation "Epeius has returned." At first those guided by what is laughable in the eyes will laugh. Then they'll look more closely. "Why did we fail to see the talents of this craftswoman? She will really help our city" – amazing, as the skeptics now see; or *thaumasian* "wonderful," even miraculous.

But consider the other possibility, that perception fails not despite its resemblance to knowledge, therefore for reasons of individual culpability or error, but because perception orients itself wrongly from the start. Ordinary perception can't be improved until it achieves philosophical status. Improvement requires the renunciation and repudiation of perception. Then philosophy has the status not of a political avant-garde, thinking and perceiving now what nonphilosophers are going to think and perceive later, but of a distinct enterprise.

Philosophy, as I said earlier, has been of two minds about its standing as a discipline. Sometimes philosophers need to understand what they do as continuous with nonphilosophical thinking. Everyone cares about right and wrong, not merely ethicists; everyone, and not only logicians, tries to think coherently. But philosophy also presents itself as the subject beyond ordinary thought.

If philosophy amounts to a separate discipline, nonphilosophers will never detect the souls of living things. We know from Glaucon's hapless endorsement of astronomy, and the rebuke he earns from Socrates, that "turning" as philosophers do takes one from visible objects of knowledge to invisible. Surely the soul's dynamics belong among invisible objects. Socrates could almost have to explain to Glaucon that just as stars are not "up" or "above" in the philosopher's sense, so too what is "in" or "inner" will not include lungs and entrails. (Children continue to be misled by the metaphor of inwardness, as when they are told that identical twins are different "on the inside." No doubt that metaphor has even frightened some children.) Those who look at a person and see a unitary integrated human being lack the skill to detect a human soul. And that is nearly everyone. At most nonphilosophers might infer from an animal's motions that a soul occupies its body. They will not see what that soul is like in the way that the philosopher's specialized knowledge sees it, and their minimal preference to souls will not be a first approximation to philosophical insights.

Indeed Socrates has said that there is a lion in every human soul, although a human being looks like a simple human "to the one not able to see what is within," which is one lacking the philosopher's understanding.[133] The myth of

unobjectionable, the third removing the marvel from the confusion with which souls entered lives, and ruling out in advance the prospect of birth into a splendid future. Curiously Gonzalez returns to Plato's phrase (269) to render it "pitiful, funny, and surpassingly strange," again thereby foreclosing the chance at wonderment.

133 Plato *Republic* Book 9: form of lion in soul, 588d2; looks like unified human to the one who can't see, 588d5–e1.

Er has Ajax come back as a lion; I imagine that this human inside the lion will go unseen as the lion does who is inside the human.

When only a philosopher ever sees the heroic soul, a philosophical avant-garde is beside the point. The philosopher may lead, but none will follow. The population will not come around to seeing its old heroes in the existing city. So much for the seizure of power that brings about the new regime; and even given a new regime, so much for the hope to persuade the city's people that they live in a beautiful city. There might be an untold just city that also goes unseen or passes for something else. When vision fails and can't be improved, the myth of Er suggests another kind of caution about the future's population, that there will be a heavenly city here on earth all right, but only philosophers will live there.

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# Part III

# Where to find the best philosophers

## The *philosophos* in Plato's *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*

### The exemplary human

Part I of this book illustrates a special case of Part II, insofar as corrupt love in human beings represents one way in which humanity inclines toward tyranny. Almost equivalently you might call Part II a special case of Part I. The ever-likely bad love in people sometimes motivates a person who comes into power and becomes a tyrant. Either way the exceptional *erôs* in philosophical souls bucks the trend toward corrupted love, and the exceptional *polis* governed by philosophical souls suspends the historical and economic laws that make injustice the default condition for human society.

So it already follows from this book's inquiries into love and politics that the human species as a whole calls for an exceptional specimen, and that we call that specimen the philosopher. The third wish and attempt to define the Platonic-exceptional does not parallel the first two but underlies them.[1] "Third to Zeus the Savior," Socrates might say, but here the one to save the world of experience is the philosopher.

The underlying problem of the human might sound easier to solve than the love- and city-problems, given that philosophers already exist. The *Republic* (for example) acknowledges that philosophers have always been around when it cites those who appear spontaneously in bad cities. Then too Socrates alerts Adeimantus and Glaucon to philosophical pretenders; and the threat of pretenders must mean not only that philosophers exist and are known by that name, but also that the name is considered a desirable one.[2]

Saying that we want to find not just any philosopher but the true philosopher is essential but does not advance the inquiry enough. The true philosopher will not differ from other examples only by excelling at philosophical reasoning. Much vice as well as virtue has come from those adept at dialectics, as Socrates says in the *Republic* but as we surely know without his help.[3] And

1 I am grateful to Cinzia Arruzza for the conversation that led me to stress this point.
2 Plato *Republic*: philosophers come to be spontaneously, 7.520b; pretenders, 6.405c–e.
3 Plato *Republic* 7.537e–538b.

although the point of making the philosopher the redeeming human type should entail that philosophers possess virtue, stipulating virtue in advance as the philosopher's defining quality might only lead us in circles, given that one expects virtue from nonphilosophers as well. It reveals something to say that piety and courage and the other human excellences belong to a genuine philosopher as they do not (necessarily) belong to genuine wrestlers or poets. The philosopher exemplifies the human as the wrestler does not. But to answer this way returns us to the question of the exceptional human. In the end the philosopher as human may reveal the most significant features of human being, but we will not find and identify the philosopher by continuing to look into the human.

Socrates in action implies more specific contrasts when he faces off against unphilosophical interlocutors. The *Symposium* displays Socrates against comic and tragic playwrights. In Plato's *Gorgias, Protagoras*, and the two *Hippias* dialogues it's philosopher *contra* sophist. And Socrates distinguishes himself from a pair of notorious oligarchical political leaders in the *Charmides.*

Plato's *Ion* very compactly brings together many traits of these opponents that Socrates faces. To the extent that an enactment of the difference helps us see where to set philosophers apart from their rivals, the *Ion* stands as a fine summary of the problem. Ion's claims to knowledge fail so abjectly that Socrates has to invent a magical explanation for his embarrassing cognitive condition. He is supernaturally empty-headed. Socrates calls the typical poet *kouphon* "airy, insubstantial,"[4] and Ion full of Homer-love and self-love sweetly combined likewise lacks anything more inside that might make him philosophy's equal.

## The *Philosopher* and its preludes

When Plato's dialogues take up the dialectical question of the philosopher as a topic, they say what these enactments often show. The philosopher needs to be distinguished conceptually from two types that pass for philosophers. Socrates asks an expert, a visiting philosopher from Elea, to define the sophist and the *politikos* "statesman, political leader" and to set both types against the philosopher. Two dialogues follow, the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, and from indications in those dialogues Plato also meant to write, or thought of writing, a third work the *Philosopher* that rounded out the trilogy.

Whether because the prospect of the third analysis had only ever been a joke, or for some other reason, Plato never wrote his *Philosopher* dialogue. The difference a philosopher makes will have to emerge from the two dialogues that

4 Plato *Ion* 534b2–3. Ion himself is not a poet but an interpreter of poetry, so Socrates does not properly apply the adjective to him. But given that Socrates says that poets operate thanks to the magnetism of divine possession, and given that he finds the same possession at work in Ion, the description is meant to apply as much to Ion as to Homer.

exist rather than from a completed trilogy. Even so there is a trilogy of sorts to draw on, because Plato's *Theaetetus* offers an initial look at the philosopher – even at the philosopher as professional and member of an organized institution – and the *Sophist* and *Statesman* are presented as sequels to the *Theaetetus*. So the chapters of this book's final section will proceed from the *Ion* and its nonphilosopher in action through Plato's sustained inquiry, over the length of three dialogues, into the theoretical difference between prominent nonphilosophical types and the desired figure the philosopher.

## Philosophers *en masse*

Only in the *Theaetetus* does Socrates call himself a philosophical midwife. Although he uses midwifery to explain his cross-examinations, the metaphor signals new elements in the meaning of the philosopher – for example, that a teaching *technê* exists and that Socrates practices it. The *koruphaios* "chorus leader, chief" among philosophers, whom Socrates digresses from the argument to portray, represents a type still further removed from the Socrates we thought we knew. This chief philosopher doesn't know where the agora is and can't identify his neighbor, where Socrates spent his days in the town's center and pestered passing neighbors.[5]

Where one leads there must be others going along. Socrates' portrayal of this philosophical ideal suggests, if not community, then a serious philosophical multiplicity or population. By contrast with Shylock's wilderness of monkeys we might call this a civilization of philosophers, or maybe an academy.[6]

The philosophers that Socrates has in mind will not be the kind who sprang out of the ground. Schools made them and they make schools. Even the mythological names that the *Theaetetus* connects with philosophy invite the question of its collectivity. The great water Ocean represents nature; his granddaughter Iris the rainbow – meaningful because freakish – disrupts natural process. If philosophy belongs with nature normally, so that it arises at all times, then philosophers appear in the regular course of things. Everyone can be a philosopher, in the sense that everyone can be a natural human.

Or do the mythological references reveal that philosophy enters against the grain, as a rainbow enters the sky, so that philosophy only happens to appear, and only sometimes? Maybe philosophy arose once and initiated a history of philosophy. And as the *Theaetetus* construes philosophy's history, it is organized around rival camps or teams, what we call schools of thought.

5 Plato *Theaetetus*: midwife, 149a–151d; *koruphaios*, 173c–175b; agora, 173c; neighbor, 174b.
6 Shakespeare *Merchant of Venice* III.i.128.

## The near-philosophers

If the *Theaetetus* formalizes the question about philosophy – what is a philosopher over and above a wise and virtuous human? – the dialogues presented as its sequels worry over later stages in that definition, when we come close enough to have a philosophical type in view but find other types nearby and nearly indistinguishable from it.

In light of the philosopher's desirability, the sophist will want to pass for that figure. The *Sophist* hounds its subject through one definition after another, sometimes seeming to catch the philosopher in the net designed for this rival. Chapter 8 reads that pursuit with attention to two features of the *Sophist*. (1) It guards itself against poems and stories, even rebuking great past philosophers for mythologizing ontology, and then finishes with a Homeric tag that recontextualizes philosopher and sophist. (2) As the definitions proceed, they abandon the one plain criterion of sophistry, which is that sophists charge money and philosophers do not. The investigation adds a representative or insider's normality to the philosopher, still marginal or exceptional yet ensconced in the community from which the sophist is being ejected.

The *Statesman* keeps the philosopher further in the background as it seeks the essence of the political leader type it is named for. Much depends on how one reads the dialogue's myth of cyclical change, which separates the age of god–kings from the time and place we occupy. If the new chronology specifies that a leader belongs to the group being led, it leaves open the philosopher's sphere of action. Somehow the philosopher imitates the divine shepherd of that other life, though not by practicing politics.

The myth suggests an alternative reading, as geography not chronology; which for politicians means that Greece differs from other nations in its republican self-government, and for philosophers suggests a tantalizing relationship with foreign cultures. The cause (the essence) of the philosopher remains elusive – tiny yet decisive – and what the further dialogue *Philosopher* might have said is impossible to guess.

# 6 "You wise people"

## The *Ion* on what sets a philosopher apart

The exceptional human being with the right to philosophize appears late. First there was ignorance, at least on one view of things, and only then philosophy. So the inquiry into the true philosopher in Plato's *Theaetetus* and its sequel-dialogues will follow after a glimpse of Plato's *Ion*, which showcases ignorance where the *Theaetetus* attempts to theorize knowledge.

There are other reasons for prefacing the *Theaetetus* with the *Ion*: small contacts between the dialogues. Ion boasts without proof of his skill as a general, but the *Theaetetus* opens with a report of its title character as he's carried nearly dead from the battlefield. The Ionian city Ephesus is named as the home of Ion, who makes a living interpreting Homer; Ephesians appear *en masse* in the *Theaetetus*, offering interpretations of Homer that they pass off as philosophy.[1]

The Ephesians are spurious philosophers, without either the student's tutelage or the tutor's discernment. As their compatriot Ion suggests the antiphilosopher here, or a parody or profanation of philosophy, therefore a caution about how low people can go without philosophy.

Boastful in other ways as well, Ion distinguishes himself by the range of the knowledge he pretends to. Drawing on Homer, he presents himself as expert in medicine, charioteering, just about every *technê*. He portrays himself speaking wisely – as a philosopher might do – and simultaneously as fit to lead an army; in other words his boasting extends to making himself a philosopher–ruler. And yet he is no competition to the *Republic*'s rulers. He rests on his understanding of how generals ought to speak, generalship amounting to oratory for him,[2] and we picture Ion discharging his military duty (*imagining* himself to have discharged it) speaking to soldiers in peacetime. He would do the job as long as there were no war on and no enemy that threatened, practicing what Plato calls a useless virtue.[3] For the tasks that philosophers perform in reality, Ion provides the appearance or simulacrum.

1 Plato: general, *Ion* 540d–541c, *Theaetetus* 142a–c; Ephesus, *Ion* 530a (and see 541d), *Theaetetus* 179e–180c.

2 Plato *Ion*: what is fitting for general to say, 540d; all orators are generals, 540e–541a.

3 Socrates says to Polemarchus that, as Polemarchus construes justice, it becomes useless around things in use, useful only when things lie useless: Plato *Republic* 1.333d–e. A general who can

He stands specifically against the cross-examining Socrates, as Socrates on trial characterizes his own history. Socrates encountered pontificating *politikoi* "political figures, statesmen"; inspired poets hopeless at explaining their own verses; the practitioners of a *technê* pumped up by their one expertise with unearned confidence regarding every other subject. Socrates embarrassed them all when he demonstrated their ignorance, so that as he says "many hatreds have arisen against me."[4] And the *Ion* casts Ion in all three roles, rendering him all Socratic interlocutors rolled up into one primeval antiphilosopher, what another commentator (despite different purposes) calls "the distillate of all of the characters of the poetic tradition that Socrates … has encountered."[5]

As self-styled general Ion belongs among the political loudmouths. Socrates acknowledges that Ion possesses a *technê*, and as the artisans did Ion concludes from his actual accomplishments that he also has political wisdom. And of course Ion fails as the *Apology*'s poets had failed. As a rhapsode he recites and interprets Homer, and the divine inspired state Socrates diagnoses in poets returns in the *Ion* to explain not only Homer but also what Ion says about him. The *Apology*'s poets fail at knowing because their verse is the result of divine dispensation; Ion fails at knowing because of the inspiration he takes secondhand from Ion who received it from his Muse.[6]

The synopsis in Plato's *Apology* omits those famed opponents to Socrates the sophists. Including them as antiphilosophers still makes Ion a target. The rhapsodes were grouped together with them, rhapsodes and sophists alike appearing at certain festivals (like the Panathenaia that Ion competed in) and dressing in purple.[7]

Even in formal narrative terms you may see Ion cast as antiphilosopher, insofar as the dialogue calls the typecasting of Old Comedy to mind. I follow Noël Carroll's reading of Ion as the comic type known as *alazôn* "braggart, imposter," which in comedy specifically denoted someone who claimed expertise – "but what he says is actually false or useless." (In a lost

speak to gathered troops on a quiet day but lacks skill at strategy or charging toward the enemy resembles Polemarchus's night-watchman just person.

4 Plato *Apology*: *politikoi*, 21c–22a; poets, 22b–c; *cheirotechnas*, 22d; "many hatreds," 23a. A *cheirotechnês* is one who practices a *technê* "by hand," often an artisan. But the word could mean anyone who had learned a *technê*: Herodotus *Histories* 2.167; a physician, for example, Sophocles *Trachiniae* 1000–1001.

5 Capuccino (2011, 91). These references to the *Apology* suggest that it too could have served as portrait of philosophy's opposite and preface to the *Theaetetus*. Scholars have noted the *Apology*'s special ties to the *Theaetetus* (Long 1998; Sedley 2004; Giannopoulou 2013). Informed by their readings, I might well have begun this part of the book with a chapter on the *Apology*; in partial compensation for its absence I use the *Apology* as a key to the *Ion*.

6 Plato *Ion*: Ion's *technê*, 530b; inspiration of Homer and Ion, 533d–535d.

7 O'Sullivan (1992, 67n32); cited in González (2013). Ion at festivals in Epidaurus and Athens, Plato *Ion* 530a, b; Sophist Hippias at Olympics, Plato *Hippias Minor* 363c–d; sophist Gorgias, Philostratus *Vitae Sophistarum* 1.9.493; dressed in purple, Aelian *varia Historia* 12.32.

comedy *Kolakes* from Plato's childhood the sophist Protagoras is accused of *alazoneia*, the quality of being an *alazôn.*) In this philosophical restaging of comic confrontations, the boaster brought down as ignorant is Ion, while Socrates plays the underdog *eirôn* who undoes the *alazôn.*[8]

The overtones of Old Comedy hit home: Socrates was the *alazôn* and butt of ridicule in the *Clouds* of Aristophanes. The *Apology* identifies Aristophanes by name as the great slanderer who poisoned Athenians' minds against Socrates.[9] The *Ion* takes over Old Comedy's confrontations so that the once-mocked philosopher can play heroic *eirôn*, while the ridicule descending on the *alazôn* now falls upon the cocky nonphilosopher.

## Ion's ignorance

Ion earns this place as philosopher's foil or opposite in the cross-examination Socrates subjects him to, what one reader calls "the plainest and most elegant case" of "antisophistical *elenchus*."[10] The cross-examination does not even pretend to disabuse Ion of some false belief *en route* to exposing his failings as thinker. In this dialogue that implication or connotation of the interlocutor's defeat becomes the subject. Ion not only knows nothing, he fails at knowing what knowing is.

Actually Socrates subjects Ion to distinct cross-examinations that take up, respectively, more or less the first third and final third of this short dialogue, with a supernaturalistic diagnosis in between of Ion's epistemic state. In the first cross-examination Ion admits to knowing only Homeric poetry, no one else's. He admits this freely even cheerfully – he's not being modest – his skill is superlative, merely confined to Homer. Socrates seizes on Ion's idiosyncrasy of expertise and contrasts it with the generalizable knowledge in other professions. Ion can't speak on the work of other poets and does not care to. He dozes off at the sound of their poems, only stirring himself again when he hears Homer mentioned.[11]

Compare anyone else with professional knowledge, Socrates says. Mathematicians bring what they know about number to all numbers.[12] Doctors can assess every statement about healthy or unsafe foods no matter who is speaking.

8 Carroll (forthcoming). On *alazôn* and *eirôn* as Old Comic types, see Rothwell (2019, 10); "what he says … false or useless," MacDowell (1990, 289); see also Holmes (2019, 90n43); the *alazoneia* of Protagoras, Eupolis *Kolakes* fragment 157, and see Storey (2003, 184–186). On the *alazôn* and *eirôn* as real-life personality types, see Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.7 1108a19–22 (where one may see Socrates as *eirôn*); Theophrastus *Characters* 1, 23.

9 Plato *Apology* 19c.

10 Bova (2016, 39).

11 Plato *Ion*: first cross-examination, 531a–533c; Ion's skill restricted to Homer, 531a.

12 Plato *Ion* 531d–e.

The second cross-examination then attacks Ion's claim to knowledge head-on. Name the species of knowledge exhibited in Homer and someone other than a rhapsode will know that subject best. For a question about chariot-driving you consult a charioteer; on prophecy, a prophet. Ion ends up clinging to the dubious consolation-*technê* of speechifying general, but even he can see that one such aptitude won't salvage his claim to greatness, and he closes the dialogue admitting he is no *technikos* "professional," indeed *mêden eidôs* "knowing nothing" when he makes his Homeric pronouncements.[13]

It is clear that the final cross-examination maps the broad and scenic landscape of Ion's ignorance. And because it is clear, and because it concludes the dialogue, this argument might seem to sum up the *Ion*'s analysis of the low epistemic status of poetry and statements about poetry.[14] In fact though the opening line of argument strikes more deeply at Ion's capacity to know. You should be able to predict that experts in all the special fields know more than Ion does about their subjects, given his maladroit approach to knowledge. He is not even looking in the direction from which knowledge arrives. How can he hope to find it when it comes?

## Fabulous ignorance

On a certain clichéd or stereotypical view of the short Socratic dialogue, Socrates completes his cross-examination with a proof of his interlocutor's epistemic ineptitude. Socrates on trial (on Plato's account) conceives his own practice this way. But the *Ion* both exposes Ion's shortcomings and theorizes them – which makes it again a fitting portrait of the nonphilosopher, not only showing that the opposites of philosophers go wrong but suggesting why they are doomed to.

In the middle section of this dialogue Socrates explains Ion's ignorance in magical language. His image does not expand into a narrative or a grand scenario on the order of some of the tales and allegories in the dialogues. It is not really a myth: Nothing happens. Nevertheless it tells of divine action, a naturalistic picture representing the supernatural phenomenon *enthousiasmos* "inspiration, divine possession," etymologically the condition of being *entheos,* having a *theos* "god" inside. ("Engodded," however clumsy, makes the point that a divine force has been inserted.)[15]

13 Plato *Ion*: Ion ignorant on charioteering and prophecy, 538b–539d; no professional, he knows nothing, 542a.

14 Thus Kahn (1996, 110–111) ascribes to the *Ion*'s Socrates a principle of isomorphism between "a science" and its "subject matter," as the final cross-examination implies but not the first. Kahn's reading plays down the diagnosis of Ion as peculiarly attached to Homer. Also see Bova (2016, 44). From a different perspective, Bova too elides over the first *elenchos*. Bova rightly says we need to identify a cause for Ion's attachment to Homer, in light of the final argument's failure to justify it; he does not also comment on the *particularity* of that attachment.

15 Plato *Ion* 533d–536d. Eugen Kullmann proposed that I treat this passage as mythical in a conversation in 1980. This chapter reflects the 40-year germination of ideas I took from him.

Think of inspiration (Socrates says) as magnetic power, with Muse as "Stone of Heraclea" or lodestone, and each poet who ever writes a poem worth hearing an iron ring hanging from the magnet. A poet's interpreter or performer, who can be a rhapsode like Ion or a tragic chorus-leader, resembles a second ring attached to the poet's magnetized iron. Finally the audience that hangs on a performer's or interpreter's words appears as a set of rings coming third in the series, held by the second ring that took its vivifying magnetism from the poet-ring that took its magnetism from the lodestone.

The laws of magnetism immediately imply one criticism of Ion, not to mention Homer. Because iron stuck to a lodestone remains magnetized for as long as it is stuck there, having magnetic power does not prove that something is a magnet. What seemed like a source turns out to be a conduit. Ion claims expertise as though having mastered a body of knowledge but only channels power that comes from elsewhere and by which he is mastered. He idolizes Homer that ultimate poetic attraction, but Homer too has accomplished no more than to pass along a greater power from higher up.

So far we have a wily comparison. Inspiration is like magnetism in certain undeniable ways, therefore also (newly) like magnetism in denying autonomy and credit to the people we once thought of as creative, wise, and adept. The model emphasizes the aspect of Platonic inspiration that Penelope Murray draws attention to, the Muses having become not simply sources of information or cause of talent, but origins of a possessed state in which the poets are taken over and lose comprehension of their own behavior.[16] Murray is right to distant Plato's Muses from the ones Hesiod speaks of in the *Theogony.*[17] But her account of the iron-rings image continues one line of reasoning that I find unfortunate, and that more recent readings also contain: that Ion goes wrong by virtue of his *passivity.* His passivity as a bit of iron overwhelmed by the magnetic force implies his inadequacy as epistemic agent. How can you know something if the knowledge flowed into you?[18]

In general "passive" may be the least-examined pejorative term still in philosophical use. But here the problem is more acute, that finding Socrates to have called Ion passive obscures his analogy's main point. The magnet and hanging chains are supposed to show the manner of Ion's inspiration, where that state is compatible with ignorance or a worse irrationality as it had not been thought to be. And for those purposes iron rings on a stone, as such, will not suffice. Iron rings on a stone also make a fine analogy for the transmission of *knowledge*.

16 Murray (1981).

17 See Hesiod *Theogony* 1–114.

18 On passivity see Capuccino (2011, 91) which speaks of the "passive mental *habitus*" of Ion. Two other excellent discussions of the past few years speak similarly: Francisco Gonzalez calls Ion or his treatment of Homer passive at Gonzalez (2011, 95, 96, 99, 105). Bova (2016, 44–45) casts the issue in terms of Ion's lacking agency.

For suppose Socrates wants to describe how the *technê* of carpentry spread. He could portray Athena as a magnet and carpenters as iron rings. Carpenters pass their expertise along to students, whom we can then picture as rings hanging from rings. Students need to take in what they learn without dispute or demurral; we may call them passive. Passive learning can be a good thing. Hence the rhapsode's knowledge, but also the doctor's and fisher's, even though Socrates will contrast rhapsody unfavorably with fishing and healing. The gods collectively bequeathed *technai* to humans: hunting skill from Artemis, metallurgy from Hephaestus, and on and on.

Here is the difference. When iron rings on a magnet represent knowledge, they behave as real-life iron rings do with real-life magnets. Chains of rings hanging from a magnet stick together side-to-side as well as top-to-bottom. More often than not they clump together. All the rings magnetized, they attract one another, just as knowledge passes from teacher to student but also among students, from student back to teacher, and every other way.

If you did see chains of iron links hanging in strands as Socrates describes them, you might ask what wizard had put the magnet there. Socrates is saying that the composition, presentation, and appreciation of poetry most resembles a magnet *not* in the sense that you know magnets to work but in this other enchanted way. This is why Ion feels no connection to Hesiod, where the student of one doctor may well learn from others. Ion resembles not a normal iron ring but a bewitched one. His savvy about Homer operates not in the good natural manner that knowledge does, but according to the rules of enchantment. Ion behaves as if under a spell.[19]

He tries to resist what this implies, that the inspiration powering Homer and secondarily him is other than knowledge, even close to madness. If you heard him presenting Homer, he says, you would not call him crazy. And the analogy does have flaws. (1) Ion admits to laughing inwardly when he moves his auditors to tears, whereas if they should laugh he'd cry to himself about botching the performance (and the hope for a good collection of money). In other words, he denies that inspiration flows directly from him to the next step down. He does not feel what his audiences feel. (2) Socrates changes the subject while spelling out his analogy, starting out with talk of the magnet-like Muse, a feminine deity, but soon calling the stone *ho theos* "the god," using masculine noun and article as one never did for a Muse. "The god [*ho theos*] takes [the poets'] intellect away." "The god [*ho theos*] himself is … speaking to us through them." "The god [*ho theos*] shows that those fine poems are not human." "The god [*ho theos*] drags people's souls."[20]

19 I say more about the tendentiousness of the *Ion*'s analogy in Pappas (1989, 2016).

20 Plato *Ion*: Ion's resistance, 536d; difference between Ion's state and his audience's, 535e; magnet cast as feminine Muse, 533d–534c (and 536a6); then masculine *ho theos*, 534c–e. Socrates says *ho theos* at 534c8–d1, d4, e2; and 536a2–3. Mateo Duque impressed upon me the significance of Ion's not feeling what his audience feels.

Ion overlooks those details despite his resistance because he feels gripped by the image Socrates offers up for the relationship that Ion does not dispute, which is his tight and exclusive and unmediated connection with Homer. He is right to feel gripped. The magnet-analogy falsifies magnetism to produce a true depiction of Ion's attachment to Homer. Ion may cling to some thought of his rationality, but *now* – that is, after the image of the magnet – Socrates demonstrates his ignorance about one subject after another, until he surrenders his fantasies of expertise and accepts divine possession as a glittering consolation prize. He had said to Socrates "I enjoy hearing you wise people,"[21] and Socrates politely reflected the compliment back to him. But the conclusion does not bother with diplomacy. Whoever "you wise people" are, Ion will not be among them.

## Homer's voice

Ion accepts Socrates' analogy, impossibly hanging rings and all, because it fits the idiosyncrasy that he conceded when characterizing his relationship with Homer. He walks right into the problem when he calls *hêrmeneia* "interpretation" his *pleiston ergon* "greatest work," the greatest effort he has to make. He speaks in superlatives. Homer is the best, and Ion comes in first as his mouthpiece, and the most work this number-one rhapsode does with the world's best poet is to generate interpretations of him.[22]

Ion presents the preference as a matter of taste, but Socrates' illustrative analogy puts rationality at stake. What Ion knows about charioteering is Homer-on-charioteering, the chariot-driving subject as it appears within the confines of Homeric epic. Maybe what Ion knows could fill a book, but it's the book that Homer wrote. And knowing what Homer says or thinks about chariots means knowing what Homer says that no one else does: knowing what is different about Homer. This means ignoring what people generally know about the subject – preferring the appearance or error to the fact – surrendering interest in reality in favor of how that reality appears to someone. When anyone else says the same thing as Homer, Ion can understand that statement too, but understands it only as a Homeric statement, which is to say only insofar as he can classify it with Homer's other sayings as uniquely Homeric.

Socrates is arguing against a *technê* of the particular. Ion reveals his distance from philosophy in his incapacity to generalize. Your dentist, being *yours*, will

21 Plato *Ion* 532d5.

22 Gonzalez (2011, 94n1) argues that Ion's *hêrmeneia* is more the recitation of Homer than interpretation. I find this hard to accept, given Ion's crucial statement that he can perform only the *hêrmeneia* of Homer. Who is incapable of *reciting* other poets? Gonzalez's examples of Platonic passages in which *hêrmeneus* means "reporter" are not as clear as he claims them to be. Finally Ion speaks of "praising" Homer, Plato *Ion* 536d. Surely he does not praise Homer by reciting Homer's words. For a fuller reply, see González (2013).

know the teeth in your head; being a *dentist*, can get to know anyone else's. Someone expert only about your teeth would fail at being an expert.

Ion's immersion in Homer makes sense to fond readers of any author. The characters in Beckett walk compulsively when they are mobile at all. They hobble on a crutch, splay their straight legs, or crawl. They walk without purpose, which explains why they sometimes wonder whether they've been moving in a circle. One could become expert at understanding the Beckett walk, not only without ever approximating to the expertise of a podiatrist, but also without knowing anything about the walking in an author Beckett oriented himself to, like Proust. Marcel's trip and misstep opens him to a world of memories, but not by virtue of resembling Molloy's crutched wandering.

From one point of view it makes sense that the *Ion*'s readers identify its main claim with the argument of its concluding section, as opposed to this opening argument. Not only more plainly laid out, the final argument portrays Ion as a braggart purporting to know everything. Which Homeric passages should a rhapsode know and judge? "All of them." If Homer addresses everything then Ion can speak on every subject too. He violates the *Republic*'s rule of performing only a single task because he presents himself as knowing pretty much every job.[23] Ion's broad-ranging confidence is more obviously a fault, where thinking is concerned, than his ardor for Homer is. In fact he shares that fault of confidence with the extravagantly encyclopedic sophist Hippias, whose pretensions to knowledge Socrates ridicules in the two dialogues named after him; or maybe with the generic "sophist" Glaucon has in mind in *Republic* Book 10, when Socrates imagines someone (it turns out to be an imitative artist) making everything on earth and in heaven.[24]

Is Plato piling on the mockery, giving Ion incompatible epistemic faults to prove how ignorant he is? His attachment to Homer seems to define Ion, and yet it problematizes the picture of the nonphilosopher.

## First and best

No question that the dialogue gives Ion a difficult psychology. His Majesty the baby wants to indulge his personal preferences and yet imagines himself omniscient. But Ion implicates Homer in both claims, making Homer both a single object of knowledge and also everything there is to know; and here we have a logical difficulty.

No one disagrees about Homer's preeminence. Socrates calls him the best poet in this dialogue, and pauses on the threshold of casting him out of the

23 Plato: "all of them," *Ion* 539e6; performing one task, *Republic* 2.369e–370c. The *Republic*'s dictum becomes especially germane to the *Ion* when Socrates characterizes all poetic *mimêsis* as impermissible multitasking, 3.394e–395c.

24 Plato *Republic* Book 10: Socrates describes one who makes everything, 596c–d; Glaucon says "A most marvelous sophist," 596d1.

*Republic*'s city to confess his longstanding love and admiration.[25] But he and Ion understand that preeminence differently. For Socrates, if Homer's language about battlefield valor is the best poetic treatment of that subject, it must compare with and surpass what Archilochus says on the subject. By comparing with what Archilochus says it belongs to the same domain. If not first among equals (too nice a word for his rivals), Homer is first among commensurables. Ion who happily denies knowledge of the other poets shouldn't be able to call Homer best.

When Ion talks about his own superiority as a rhapsode he thinks in comparative terms. He took *ta prôta* "the first, first place" in a contest at Epidaurus. He counts on winning again in Athens. Why? Because no one else from his time or a past time can produce "as many and as beautiful ideas[*dianoias*] as I."[26] Ion speaks (as he says again) *kallist'anthrôpôn* "finest of all people." A field of speakers exists; other good members of the field come up with beautiful thoughts; Ion gives better ones and more of them. His finish in first place implies other rhapsodes second and third. Homer though manages to be best without stooping to be better-than, incomparably number one as Gorgias calls Helen "first among the first of men and women."[27]

Homer comes first for Ion much as the lovers whom Aristophanes describes in the *Symposium* occupy top rank for each other. For as Aristophanes accounts for it, erotic attachment began before anyone else existed. The one you want was the first person in your life, whether mythically because you two made up the same spherical being, or – on the allegorical reading – because she was your mother. True love originates in a time when there were no Others; the idea of the first as best among rivals disappears. What had been first remains the only one.

The *Ion* keeps forms of the word *prôtos* before its reader's eyes, sometimes meaning first in time but not always, and sometimes in the comparative form *proteros* "before, prior."[28] So the echoing etymology of "first" is audible when Socrates makes his teasing complaint about Ion near the end of the dialogue. "You twist up and down just like Proteus [*Prôteus*]," and Socrates as latter-day Menelaus can't get a grip on this interlocutor who styles himself rhapsode then general.[29]

The etymological echo of *prôtos* in Proteus's name reflects his age. He is an "old man of the sea." In the *Odyssey* Menelaus recalls ambushing Proteus and clinging to him through every change of shape, until the old one told

25 Plato: *Ion* 530b10; *Republic* 10.595c.

26 Plato *Ion*: Ion took first place, 530b1; counts on doing the same in Athens, 530b2–3; no one else says as many fine things, 530d1–3; speaks finest of all, 533c.

27 Gorgias *Encomium of Helen* 3.

28 Plato *Ion*: poet first against magnet, 536a1; *proteros*, 534b5, 536d10, 537d3; on temporal sense of *proteros* elsewhere, see *Phaedrus* 274c1.

29 Plato *Ion* 541e.

Menelaus how to get home.[30] Varyingly shaped though he is, Proteus also contains truths.

Plato's dialogues mention Proteus as shape-shifter; but reading a reference to him in the *Euthydemus* M. M. McCabe brings forward his significance as also "wise teller of truths." McCabe treats this other side of Proteus as his alternate meaning, for the purpose of showing what is protean about the *Euthydemus*'s Socrates as well. The specifics of her intriguing reading aside, McCabe is surely right to remember the truth in Proteus – Socrates' mention in the *Ion* implies his capacity for truth-telling too – although she sets the telling of truth apart from the shape-shifting as though mythology had conjoined the two traits arbitrarily.[31] Actually the traits go together as two attributes of Proteus's great old age, the wise truthfulness obviously, but also the multiplicity of appearances, as long as we understand a divinity's great age to indicate not senescence and decline but rather an early arrival in cosmogony: archaic primordial status. Called a servant of Poseidon, Proteus seems mainly to have the job of *nomeus* "herdsman," metaphysically one who guides groups of natural beings, and in antiquity's anthropology one who lived outside or before civilization, as the herdsman Polyphemus does. (Those who herd are mythically set apart from those who are settled and till, as Abel is from Cain.)[32] Personifying nature in its first stages Proteus represents what is fecund and chaotic, hence on the one hand multiple in appearance but also if not truthful exactly then candid, "inerrant," as his daughter says, in the way that nature is.[33]

As nature in person, Proteus represents a fantasy of knowledge according to which nature possesses truths and keeps them secret. The being *of* nature becomes knowledge *in* nature, according to this fantasy, as if it were known to nature; as if nature knew itself. Proteus is all things and therefore ought to know all things. The seeker after knowledge, Menelaus or Socrates, grabs hold of nature with a question in the hopes of gaining information. To know as humans do is to seek to be. Such fantasies produce skepticism when all the knowledge one attains falls short of the knowledge possessed in the way one imagines it to be possessed – when, for example, failing to feel someone's pain underwrites the claim that you don't know the other to be in pain.

Protean Ion embodies Homer in the way that Proteus embodies lion fish and fire. He "hides himself" like a mimetic poet, merging with Homer and

30 Homer *Odyssey* Book 4: Proteus *gerôn* "old man," 365, 384, 401, 410; Menelaus recalls learning from him, 435–570.

31 Proteus in Plato: *Euthydemus* 288b; *Euthyphro* 15d; *Republic* 2.381d. Opposition between "shape-shifter" and "wise teller of truths" (McCabe 2008, 123). I am grateful to conversation with Gwenda-lin Grewal on this topic.

32 For the non-agricultural Cyclopes, see Homer *Odyssey* 9.108–111; for Cain and Abel, Genesis 4.2.

33 Homer *Odyssey* Book 4: Proteus Poseidon's servant, 386; *nomeus*, 413; *nêmertês* "inerrant," 384, 401.

feeling Homer.[34] Plato's Socrates equates Proteus with two sophists in the *Euthydemus* (sophists whose epistemic misdeed is emphasized as their "mimicking" Proteus[35]) and with the glib and sophistical Euthyphro in the dialogue named after him. Again, and *pace* McCabe, Proteus stands for those opposite to philosophy. The *Republic* says that stories about him are unworthy of a god; this implies that he makes a bad model for philosophers, who at their best are godlike.

At his best Ion speaks for Homer in the sense that a thermometer speaks for the temperature. In his closeness to Homer he does not think about Homer but thinks as Homer does. Therefore he knows too little, because letting Homer speak through him confines him to the Homeric perspective on every subject. Therefore, too, he claims too much about what he knows, because letting Homer speak through him opens Ion's mouth to include the entire epic world. Ion comes in first as if he's just been born, identical with everything and therefore cognizant of nothing.

## Coming out of Homer

In most charitable terms we might restate Socrates' claim about Ion's ignorance by saying: Ion's relationship to Homer is not a knowledge-relation.[36] Socrates may sound pitiless in moving from a nonepistemic relation to the charge of ignorance, but at least his strong words draw attention to the absence of ordinary knowing at work.

Considered as an attachment independent of knowledge, as well as in its exclusivity from Ion's point of view, his orientation toward Homer again recalls erotic relations as explained by Aristophanes. Aristophanic lovers too desire without knowledge, or if you prefer with the knowing that amounts to their being the loved one – an intimacy for which (as in Genesis) knowledge is a metaphor.[37]

Moreover the question of what Ion knows keeps turning into the question of what gives him pleasure, as carnal knowledge does. Socrates opens the dialogue saying *chairein* to him, idiomatically "Welcome!" or "Hail!" but in a literal translation "Enjoy!" Have some fun, Ion. Socrates calls Ion *entheos* "divinely possessed," and classical authors including Plato and Xenophon used that word for the state of being gripped by *erôs.* Most specifically we have Ion's confession that he falls asleep around anyone else's poetry but comes to or wakes up when someone mentions Homer. This language equally

34 Carroll (forthcoming) – rightly, in my opinion – reads Ion as mimetic artist. See Plato, *Republic* 3.393a–c on mimetic poets' hiding themselves.

35 On the *mimêsis* at work in the *Euthydemus* passage, see Kosman (1992).

36 Bova (2016, 43). Bova then asks what other relations there might be, although his answer differs from mine.

37 Adam knew Eve his wife, Genesis 4.1; see Lot's dialogue with the people of Sodom, Genesis 19.5, 19.8.

well describes erotic indifference and arousal, as it does in Theocritus's *Idyll* 18: Theocritus imagines Menelaus sleepy on his wedding night, and that this drowsiness means desexualization is clear from the way it leaves Helen unsatisfied.[38]

The thought of a desexualized Menelaus, to whom Socrates implicitly compares himself when he speaks of Proteus, underscores the perverseness of Ion's love. Menelaus's incapacity for arousal left Helen in a desirous state that facilitated the Trojan War, the retelling of which by Homer arouses Ion. Already erotic excitement has migrated from the place it is suited to, to the poetically fabricated presentation of the consequences of the arousal's absence.[39]

For Aristophanes, perverseness among lovers revealed itself to include *erôs* between mother and son. Ion's relationship to Homer invites an Oedipal reading too. Socrates' image has him hanging from Homer as if about to drop. He comes from Homer and loves him; if Socrates is right, Ion loves Homer *because* he comes from him. Even one point of disanalogy already noted reinforces this reading: Ion affirmed his intimacy with Homer but denied feeling what his audience did. He laughs when they weep and would weep if they laughed. Literally this means that the divine power passing through Homer to Ion did not pass further, but it makes sense allegorically. Arrested in desire for Homer, Ion ignores future generations. He does not envision himself growing up, as he would have done had he achieved separation. His relationship with his progenitor terminates the genealogy.

(The severed genealogy incidentally also calls tyrants' families to mind, therefore all the psychopathologies of tyranny. One consequence of the way they pervert sexuality, as observed in earlier chapters, is that tyrants lack normal bloodlines and legacies.[40])

Another ostensible error in the imagery facilitates the Oedipalizing interpretation of Ion. Until quite modern centuries, Homer was treated as masculine, while the greater force above him is a Muse, whom we might reasonably imagine as a female first cause and great mother.[41] And yet, as this chapter has remarked, Socrates shifts from the usual feminine language for the Muse to speaking of the masculine *ho theos* "god, the god." The Greeks did sometimes

38 Plato *Ion*: *chairein*, 530a1; Ion *entheos*, 533e5, e7, 534b6; drowsy, 532c1–3. On the opening *chairein*, see Bova (2016, 40). For *entheos* that means erotic possession, see Plato *Symposium* 179a, Xenophon *Symposium* 1.10. The verb *egeirô* that Ion uses for Homer's effect on him most commonly refers to waking, but can also mean having passions roused: Hesiod *Shield of Heracles* 176; Demosthenes *On the False Assembly* 19.305; more broadly Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 1778. Sleepy Menelaus: Theocritus *Idylls* 18.

39 Special thanks to Noah Davies-Mason for an exchange on this subject.

40 On this topic see Vernant (1982).

41 The exception to this rule is Samuel Butler's *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, which argued in 1897 that a Sicilian woman wrote the *Odyssey.* No other ancient epic, according to Butler, features so many effective female characters. But his theory has not won many converts. I thank Peter Simpson for bringing the argument to my attention.

refer to a female deity with the noun *theos* instead of the feminine *thea*, as when speaking of Athena, and as Socrates does with Bendis in the *Republic*. But then they used the feminine article *hê*, not the *ho* found in these sentences from the *Ion*.[42]

If you would never call a Muse *ho theos*, then whom is Socrates referring to? He appears to have Apollo in mind. The *Phaedrus* credits Apollo by name with inspiring oracles and soothsayers.[43]

Meanwhile the argument feminizes Homer. In a context that clearly includes Homer, Socrates says a poet is *kouphos* "light, hollow" – what a Greek man would have said about women – and compares a poet to a honeybee. This noun, spelled *melitta* or *melissa*, is feminine; but not only the noun. The honeybee represents a type of woman, indeed the only good type, in the famously misogynistic poem *Women*, written by Semonides of Amorgos centuries before Socrates.[44]

The traditional genders of Homer and Muse obscure Ion's Oedipal *erôs*. Subverting and reversing the genders, as these slips and small words invite readers to do, bring his crisis forward. Socrates is showing where babies come from. Ion, still infantile in his attachment to Mother Homer, learns that Homer could have made him only given an earlier cause, the Father god whose force entered Homer. "Where you thought you came from your mother alone, I will show you the masculine parent who enabled her to generate you." Homer now belongs to an unvanquishable rival. The iron rings threaten Ion's love not merely by diminishing Homer but also inasmuch as they deprive Ion of his unchallenged enjoyment of Homer.

The dialogue closes with a consolation, the attribute *theios* "divine" that Ion accepts gratefully.[45] If *the god* is up above as his true father then Ion truly is divine. He had been a foundling; the old story comes to light. This point is not psychoanalytic but mythic. I agree with Carlotta Capuccino that we want to ask why Plato named this character "Ion." I only worry that she investigates the difficult and surprising meanings of the name while neglecting the easiest reading.[46] The Ion in Euripides' tragedy *Ion* is a foundling, searched for by his mother Creusa, who learns that his true father is the god Apollo. Wise Socrates therefore does in this dialogue what wise Athena does in the other great Athenian *Ion*, disclosing divine paternity. Only this Ion has to take the good news about divine parentage with the bad news that he faces competition for his mother's attention.

42 Plato *Republic* 1.327a.

43 Plato *Phaedrus*: Apollo and *mantikê*, the oracular profession, 265b. Compare *Ion* 534c8–d2, where the *theos* who inspires poets also makes use of *mantesi* "diviners, prophets."

44 Plato *Ion*: poet *kouphos* and like a bee, 534b. On the honeybee woman, Semonides 7 (*Women*), 86.

45 Plato *Ion* 542a–b.

46 Capuccino (2011, 85–86).

Redescribing Ion's expertise about Homer into baby-love leaves him as irrational as ever, not to mention inept as ever at teaching. Rather than undo an interpretation of Ion it enhances the thought that Ion has not differentiated himself from Homer; not to mention the thought that most everyone has had about Ion, that he is childish or undeveloped. The Oedipal Ion combines the two ideas in a conception of him in infancy, still not released from the uterus that formed him. Here again is what nonphilosophy can descend to.

## And the philosopher?

When he puts Ion in his place Socrates invites the question what philosophy's place might be. The dialogues of Plato's trilogy will seek to discover the philosopher as a human possibility even verging on exceeding the human, where Ion in his natural condition falls short of some human possibility.

The philosophers who differ from Ion, to present themselves as successfully born, will have to stand in a more mediated relationship to the world than he does, not simply being (or not being *simply*) manifestations of natural forces. They will have to sound less ridiculous than he does as potential rulers, whatever philosophical governance will mean in a world that continues to lack philosopher–kings.

The coming chapters will speak of teaching, partly because I understand the *Theaetetus, Sophist*, and *Statesman* to be documents of the institution of learning that was Plato's Academy; but above all because it is so specially hard to imagine Ion teaching anything. Indeed it is impossible to see him as a philosopher just *because* he can't be pictured teaching. Whatever identification or absorption took place between Ion and Homer fails to occur between Ion and his audiences, which remain in a state of mind different from his, unabsorbed by Ion and failing to identify themselves with him. This difference alone shows that whatever flowed into Ion has nowhere to flow next.

Fair enough. To philosophize is to teach to philosophize. Easy to say; but *what* philosophers teach, how they learn it, and whom they teach it to takes as much effort to explain as a love better than the worldly loves known thus far, or a city that bests any existent city.

If I am right to find the *Ion* informed by the question of what a philosopher should be, its portrayal of Ion in all his inadequacy frames a challenge we can state pretty narrowly. How do philosophers speak, if not on behalf of the source they learned from? How do they know what they know?

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# 7 Philosophers at last

## *Theaetetus*, Socrates, and the head philosopher

In the best case the human as animal that reasons ought to mean the philosophizing animal, because reasoning at its best brings us to philosophy. Against Ion who enthusiastically lacks knowledge of his own yet holds himself apart from the admiring crowd – a vain man who thinks in vain – the exception to that human commonplace will exhibit ambitious theoretical activity on the one hand, on the other hand virtue and cooperativeness, or at least cooperativeness with other philosophical types.

Plato's *Theaetetus* comments on philosophical practice more than other dialogues do, and explicitly in the description that Socrates gives of the philosopher at around dialogue's midpoint.[1] Besides that account of the type Socrates also names or alludes to philosophers and intellectual forebears: Thales, Parmenides, Melissus, Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Protagoras; philosophizing poets like Homer, Hesiod, and Epicharmus; old groups like the Ephesians, maybe later ones like the Cyrenaics and the Megarians. If the *Theaetetus* does not deliver up the exceptional philosopher, it certainly marks out the place where that personage should go.

### Images of philosophers

Socrates calls his character sketch of the philosopher type a *parergon* "additional task," not as if it missed the point of their epistemological investigations but recognizing it as a further achievement. Heracles for his *parergon* founded the Olympics not contravening his assigned labors but in the same spirit: another civilizing gift.[2]

1 Plato *Theaetetus* 173c–177c. This description begins a bit more than 31 Stephanus pages after the start of the dialogue, and concludes almost exactly 33 pages before the dialogue does.

2 Plato *Theaetetus*: portrait contrasted with *ton ex archês logon* "original discussion," 177b–c; contrasted with examining knowledge, 184a. A departure from the argument contrasted with the task *protethen* "set before us," *Statesman* 302b. Philosophical arguments are now not spontaneous. For *parergon* contrasted with *ergon* "work" see *Euthydemus* 273d; *Laws* 7.807d; contrasted with an assigned task, *Phaedrus* 274a; *Republic* 6.498a. Accomplishments of Heracles besides his labors (commonly known as *parerga*): Pindar *Olympian Ode* 10 tells of Heracles' founding the Olympic Games after cleaning the Augean stables.

This one Socrates calls *koruphaios* "head man" among philosophers parts ways with humanity to such a degree that he is unsure whether his neighbors are animals. *A fortiori* he parts ways with Socratic interlocutors too, avoiding the courtroom when we saw Euthyphro taking his own father to court; despising the prizes that Ion brags about; heedless of the genealogies that Hippias compiles.[3]

However distinguished from ordinary people the philosopher must have company, as the word *koruphaios* implies: head of a tragic chorus, strong man in government.[4] The *Theaetetus* speaks of philosophers' following Homer their commander as in a psychic corps; of philosophical squads met in a tug-of-war; of "sitting out as donkey" from an inquiry as one did from a team sport.[5] Most of all, and most collectively of all, the *Theaetetus* speaks of schools and teaching. "Everywhere the human world is full of those seeking teachers and leaders: for themselves, for other animals, and for lines of work," Socrates says.[6] Here we may group thinkers together into what on Plato's behalf I call a civilization of philosophers. These people learn but also impart their learning. Philosophy recreates itself.

Despite the faults the *Theaetetus* ascribes to Protagoras, whom Socrates targets for refutation through the dialogue's first half, it acknowledges his function as a teacher, as many ancient sources do.[7] Protagoras has a school doctrine: Theaetetus proposes defining knowledge as a species of perception, and Socrates credits Protagoras with that teaching. No idiosyncratic dogma, the relativism of Protagoras links him to a larger tradition, as befits a teacher who has learned from others. Certain "subtler" thinkers hold a secret perceptual theory resembling that of Protagoras; Heraclitean philosophies of ceaseless natural change underwrite those relativist empiricisms.[8]

3 Plato *Theaetetus*: neighbors maybe animals, 174b; avoiding courtroom, 173d; despising honors, 174c–d; heedless of genealogies, 174e–175b. Compare *Euthyphro* 3e–4d; *Ion* 530a–d; *Hippias Major* 285d–e on the respective eponymous characters.

4 In an oligarchy (says Persia's Darius), each oligarch wants to be *koruphaios*: Herodotus *Histories* 3.82.3. But the term's association with a dramatic chorus of philosophers is reinforced at *Theaetetus* 173b, c.

5 Plato *Theaetetus*: philosophers of nature and Homer their general, 153a; tug-of-war between Eleatics and nature philosophers, 181a; donkey, 146a. As regards the military metaphor, note that Socrates speaks of philosophers' *sumpheresthôn* "brought together," 152e2, as in an army; compare Athenians *xumpheromenous* at Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* 7.36.5. Writing centuries later Pollux describes tug-of-war, which he calls *dielkustinda*, *Onomasticon* 9.112; the game from which one sits out might be *ostrakinda*, *Onomasticon* 9.111–112 (Freeman 1936, 29). I presume that any game from which one person has to sit out involves a group. More than one person has to remain in the game when the donkey is sitting out.

6 Plato *Theaetetus* 170b.

7 Protagoras as teacher: Plato *Protagoras* 317b, 318a, 318d, 349a. See Stephanus of Byzantium "Abdera"; Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 9.53; *Anecdota greca Parisiensis*, p. 171, line 31; Stobaeus *Anthology* 3.29.80.

8 Plato *Theaetetus*: Theaetetus on knowledge, 151e; Socrates credits Protagoras, 152a; *kompsoteroi* "subtler" thinkers, 156a; Heraclitus, 152e.

Modern readers have to speculate about some of the traditions being alluded to. Plato prefaces the *Theaetetus* with a framing dialogue in which Socrates' conversation with Theaetetus, now a written transcript, is read aloud in the Greek city of Megara; and Megara housed a distinctive group of Socratic philosophers. More substantively the subtler thinkers with their elaborated perceptual theory might be the Cyrenaics, a school of thought that split from other Socratics.[9] For the grandest tradition no speculation is necessary. Socrates' move from Protagoras to Heraclitus defines a tradition so venerable that it almost comprises all philosophy to that date. Protagorean relativism reinstantiates the theory of flux that had been enunciated before Heraclitus by Epicharmus the comic poet; Empedocles belongs with them as another theorist of a nature in constant motion; before everyone else Homer, whose *Iliad* at the head of the Greek cultural tradition told of "Ocean [*ôkeanos*] the origin [*genesis*] of the gods and Tethys their mother." Evidently Ocean the great freshwater river represents change, and as joint cause of all other beings he makes changeability the birthright or legacy of all creation.[10]

Against the nature–philosophers Socrates pits the Eleatics, who had criticized the idea of motion. Parmenides and Melissus take the side opposite to nature's philosophers in a long-enduring tug-of-war for the soul of the subject. This passage goes further than any other from the dialogues toward giving philosophy a history; and if the dialogues recognize any philosophers as a school it is the Eleatics. Parmenides and Melissus are said to *apephênanto* "have shown" that there is no motion – equivalently to "have begotten" that teaching, as we may also translate the verb in reinforcement of the image of school as legacy and tradition.[11]

Besides both belonging to a philosophical history, the Eleatics and Protagoreans both possess essential books. In Plato's *Parmenides*, Socrates spies the harmony between the *grammata* "writings" of Zeno and the Parmenidean philosophy. But although Zeno praises Socrates' pursuit of his claims he has to clarify the Parmenidean spirit in which he had written them, an intent confused when someone stole and distributed the work. To outsiders a written work will convey what its arguments say, but those outsiders might not grasp the *alêtheia* "truth" about it. At best they track down the work's point the way Socrates does, "pursuing like a Spartan pup."[12]

9 Plato *Theaetetus*: opening frame, 142a–143c; conversation as transcript read aloud, 143a–c (Zilioli 2013).

10 Plato *Theaetetus*: Heraclitus etc., 152d–e; Ocean the origin, 152e, also (in generalized form) 180d. The verse comes from Homer *Iliad* 14.201, 302.

11 Plato *Theaetetus* 180d–e. On whether this passage constitutes mere doxography or counts as history of philosophy, see Mansfeld (1986), and Mann (1996). The Eleatics as school in Plato *Sophist*: the stranger a companion to the companions of Parmenides and Zeno, 216a; Eleatic, *genos* "tribe, kind," 216a; *ethnos* "nation," 242b.

12 Plato *Parmenides*: *grammata* of Zeno, 127c, 128b; clarification of its truth, 128c–d; someone stole it, 128d–e; "Spartan pup," 128c1. The cautions about writing at *Phaedrus* 275d–277a are related, but do not speak of or imply schools and students.

Protagoras wrote a book too, which as it happens was titled *Alêtheia "Truth,"* and its first sentence read: "The human is the measure of all things." Although one could read that sentence in its plain public sense, a simple claim about ambiguous names for things will not bring the metaphysical tradition to light. So Socrates sets the semantic reading of the sentence aside as surface and moves to the hidden meaning, what Protagoras must have vouchsafed to students or "initiates." The teacher sets the meaning straight; untutored readers only pick up what Protagoras said when speaking with the vulgar. Socrates decides that the truth encrypted inside *Truth* – what "The human is the measure" *pôs legei* "somehow says; just about says" – is that things are as they appear to each perceiver.[13]

Protagoras now represents the kind of teaching that entails a community of students who learn what outsiders do not. His book defines the border between the two groups. As Zeno's writings look from the outside like the usurpation of Eleatic thinking, from inside like youthful Eleatic partisanship, so too the truth inside *Truth* requires schooling to make itself known. Protagoras must have posed the riddle of relativism "to the good-for-nothing public, while secretly telling his students the truth" – the insider's meaning of *Truth* the book now revealed as "truth hidden away."[14]

The openness to reinterpretation that lets a sentence in *Truth* work as screen to Protagoras's esoteric philosophy also leaves that philosophy vulnerable to being taken over by a reader – Socrates for instance. Has Protagoras discovered something about human judgment and its power? But you could restate that sentence "Pig is the measure of all things," or "Baboon is."[15] A talking pig might celebrate the porcine sophist who coined that phrase, but it wouldn't impress a human. The maxim says less than it means to. A human may measure, but so does a pig; nothing follows; and Protagoras has lost control over readings of his sentence. Socrates redoes what the sophist teacher had been doing, if acknowledging in the process that Protagoras taught and initiated students.

## A negative case

The *Theaetetus* may seem bent on discovering conspiracies of instruction and far-reaching traditions of thought where none had been suspected to exist, but it also takes the trouble to deny the status "school" to some groups.

13 Plato: "the human [*anthrôpon*] the measure," *Theaetetus* 152a; Socrates reads that as claim about names of things, *Cratylus* 385e, 386c; Protagoras having secret doctrine, 152c–156c; theory of education ascribed to him, 167a; Protagoras *dêmoumenon* "speaking with the vulgar," 161e4; hidden meanings to students, 152d; also see 156a on secret doctrine, "uninitiated" at 155e; what "human is measure" somehow says, 152a7.

14 Plato *Theaetetus*: "did he riddle," 152c; "truth hidden away," 155d; real version of *Truth*, 152d.

15 Plato *Theaetetus* 161c.

The nonschool is the one active in Ephesus. Theodorus, third party in this conversation and mostly an audience to Socrates and Theaetetus, bristles at the idea of the Ephesians' legitimacy. Socrates realizes that the Ephesians mostly badger and snap at any philosopher they're fighting against, but still imagines doctrines behind their public contentiousness. Surely they explain their own theories "in school, or at leisure [*epi scholês*] … to their students, whom they want to make like [*homoious*] themselves."[16]

Not a bit, says Theodorus. "School"? "Student"?[17] Those people haven't earned the right to such honorifics. Among followers of Heraclitus no one concedes being another one's student. "They spring up of their own accord [*automatoi*] wherever each one happens to get inspired [*enthousiasas*]."[18] They are as incapable of philosophical discourse as *oistrôsin* "maddened, goaded men," those stung by an *oistros*, the fly that had driven Io on her long peregrinations.[19]

Socrates concurring adds another complaint. Ancient wise authors had kept their theories of kinetic nature hidden in such gnomic poetry as Homer's verse "Ocean and Tethys the origin of all." But today's clever Heracliteans decoded the hidden wisdom for the multitudes to understand, and now any cobbler can tell you that everything moves.[20]

Ion in the *Ion* likewise hails from Ephesus; likewise discloses Homer's meaning to a broad audience; presents himself as the Ephesians do as a man without peer or professor; is called inspired. The philosophers from his hometown may be grouped with him. Far from philosophy, they practice a disputatious performance that contrasts badly even with the sophist Protagoras. They do not teach, and (or really: what comes to the same thing) they publicize the secret meanings of written works, instead of confining those meanings to their students.

Philosophical exclusion of the kind that Socrates practices against the Ephesians does not simply push the nonphilosopher away but ranks the philosopher higher. At its most exalted, this elevation makes the philosopher godlike: Socrates finishes his sketch of the *koruphaios* saying that figure makes himself like god, although interpreters debate whether that assimilation to the divine implies the philosopher's moral virtue or contemplation.[21]

16 Plato *Theaetetus* 179e–180b.

17 Before Plato's time, and largely during his time, *scholê* meant "leisure." I read it "school" here because Socrates is picturing the Ephesians among students. Aristotle will soon use *scholê* in clear reference to school, with *scholastikos* for scholar: *Politics* 5.1313b2–3; see Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 5.37 on *scholastikos* in a letter from Aristotle's student Theophrastus.

18 Plato *Theaetetus* 180c.

19 Plato *Theaetetus* 179e5–6. On *oistros* and sexual heat Euripides *Bacchae* 32, 119, 665, 1229; madness of Orestes, Euripides *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1456; stinging fly and Io, Aeschylus, *Suppliants* 15–17, 540–564, Ovid *Metamorphoses* 5.330; Padel (1995, 14–17).

20 Plato *Theaetetus* 180d.

21 Plato *Theaetetus* 176a–b; also see *Timaeus* 90d; *Laws* 4.716c–d, 7.792d, 12.966c–d. Modern Platonic studies had ignored "becoming like god" but lately readers have debated its meaning

Now Heraclitus reportedly compared the difference between god and human to the difference between human and ape, or so Socrates says in another dialogue.[22] So the chief philosopher's mistaking his neighbors for beasts, the Ephesian philosophers like cattle maddened by an *oistros*, the Protagorean formula transformed into swine's-eye relativism, even the pause from dialogue that is called sitting out as donkey, all reinforce the ontological divide between humans as they naturally exist and (the truest) philosophers.

In pettiest terms the elevation of the philosopher is expressed through social distinctions. Socrates tells of Thales falling down a well, then laughed at by a Thracian slave girl, and any ennobled contrast with the nonphilosopher is drowned out by this reference to an easy target neither free nor male nor Greek. Metaphorically Socrates sets the philosopher against an orator, the one like a gentleman where the other's a truckling slave. In a crowning display of slave-owners' disregard, this whole *Theaetetus*-conversation is being read aloud by a slave. What does *that* reader think about slavery always representing the least philosophical life and least worthy of respect? At least in Plato's *Meno,* the uneducated slave reaches insights about diagonals and square roots; however patronizing, the *Meno* is also potentially subversive. And even in the *Theaetetus* itself, a true philosopher is depicted as heedless of genealogies precisely because every family history is bound to contain a slave. It would not be anachronistic, only consistent, for Plato to depict nonphilosophers as something other than slaves.[23]

The wisecrack from Socrates about cobblers and the Ephesian philosophy likewise feels more unpleasant as uncharacteristic contempt for working professionals.[24] Why did it ruin the doctrine of natural flux for a philosopher to disseminate that doctrine in Homer's references to Ocean and then have a shoemaker learn it? Socrates is saying that cobblers do *not* in fact learn flux. Instruction has failed. The Ephesians' way of demythologizing Homer has sent his theory of flux out no longer as theory but as scuttlebutt.

(Annas 1999, 52–71; Sedley 1999; Drefcinski 2014). Armstrong (2004) argues that resembling the god should and sometimes does entail, for Plato, becoming a cause of good in the world, as the creator–god is in the *Timaeus*. This chapter's account of the philosopher should be compatible with either answer.

22 Plato *Hippias Major* 289a–b. It is unclear how much of the passage contains the actual words of Heraclitus and how much is a tendentious interpretation by Socrates; but he cites Heraclitus on the most beautiful of apes being ugly compared to humans, and then either expands the thought, or imports an additional thought, that the wisest human will look like an ape compared to a god.

23 Plato *Theaetetus*: Thales and Thracian, 174a; orator like slave, 175d–e; slave (*pais* "boy") reading dialogue aloud, 143c; every genealogy containing slaves, 175a. For the slave's geometry proof, see Plato *Meno* 82b–85b. DuBois (2003) raised the question of the slave reading aloud, and examines slavery in the *Meno*.

24 See Plato *Republic* 6.495e for a similar noxious comparison between pseudophilosophers and an *arriviste* tinker.

Socrates frequently uses shoemakers as examples of experts[25]; here he turns them into fools. Man at last hammering sole explains to a customer why the old shoes wore down. "Everything changes."[26]

Other passages in Plato deny the cobbler some activity or knowledge. Socrates says at his trial that professionals conclude from knowing their own business that they can handle everyone's business. But this way of going wrong comes of their knowing something. Likewise the *Republic*'s cobblers possess expertise and thereby differ from imitative artists, and by possessing expertise about shoes differ from ship pilots and carpenters. As cobblers they differ more thoroughly than that from the city's soldiers, most emphatically from the rulers.[27] One suspects despite countervailing testimony from Pliny that the cobbler's sticking to the last had been proverbial before Plato.[28] And given that not ruling means not philosophizing in the *Republic*, one might read both dialogues as comparably denying philosophical learning to shoemakers.

But the difference matters. The cobblers' knowledge in the *Republic* renders them noncarpenters and nonrulers. Their not knowing other things results from their knowing shoemaking. The *Theaetetus*'s dismissal of the cobbler who wants to know nature assumes a cobbler's – any cobbler's – incapacity to learn, perhaps incapacity to learn anything.

If the *Theaetetus* seems to overstate the low place of slaves, women, non-Greeks, and artisans, that urge to stratify may bespeak, as the animal comparisons do – not to mention the aspiration to divinity – the importance to this dialogue of separating philosophers from other humans. Philosophers seek the company of philosophers and exclude rivals from that company. Philosophers not only go to school, they stay in schools.

## A place for Socrates

When the question first came up of identifying exceptional true philosophers over against the common run of humanity, one might have wondered why the answer isn't simply "Socrates." We know he existed, which is more than you can say about the world's erotic or political exceptions.

But as the *Theaetetus* spells out what makes a true philosopher, Socrates begins to look less definitely like what his own arguments have in mind. As philosophy comes to locate itself in schools, Socrates stands in need of

25 Plato *Gorgias* 447d; *Protagoras* 319d; *Republic* 333a, 397e, 443c – and even *Theaetetus* 146d. See Plato *Gorgias* 491a; *Symposium* 221e for characters' remarks on frequent Socratic references to shoemakers (Sellars 2003, 209n18).

26 Today one might update the joke with a shoemaker asking, "You never heard tell of the second law of thermodynamics? It's entropy, man." Same sentiment.

27 Plato *Republic*; cobbler's expertise, 1.333a, 2.369d; cobbler not an imitator, 10.601a; not also a ship's pilot, 3.397e; not carpenter, 4.434a; not soldier, 2.374c, 4.434b; not ruler, 4.434c.

28 Pliny *Natural History* 35.85. Pliny dates the proverb to the time of Alexander (thus after Plato's death). The Latin proverb says *Sutor, ne ultra crepidam* "Cobbler, not beyond the shoe," or in its modern version "The cobbler should stick to his last."

reinterpretation. Does he teach as philosophers do? Where does he fit in the tradition that he has described? These are not invented questions, for again it is a sign of the *Theaetetus*'s concern about such matters that it addresses Socrates' place, or more correctly his placelessness.

Socrates tells Theaetetus that people call him *atopôtatos*.[29] As Chapter 2 observes, the Greek for "place" is *topos*, and *atopos* means "out of place," more idiomatically "eccentric, weird." The word Socrates uses is the superlative form of the adjective: "entirely out of place." Anyone who's dipped into a Platonic dialogue has found examples of the peculiarity in Socrates. He confounds his interlocutors' beliefs without offering anything better to replace them with. What this dialogue sees as school and teaching seem to have nothing to do with Socrates.

The point has a historical context. The real-life Theaetetus is said to have known Plato and to have participated in his Academy. Especially if he really knew Socrates – though it is enough that this dialogue purports that he did – Theaetetus serves as a link between Socrates and the institution that came into existence a dozen years after his death. Showing Socrates to fit the *Theaetetus*'s description of the philosopher then means showing him to belong among the Socratics at the Academy.

In this connection it is telling that a written dialogue exists of a conversation that Socrates engaged in. Most of the *Theaetetus* consists of just that dialogue being read aloud. Other dialogues have characters recounting events that involve Socrates, and the *Laws* alludes to written records of philosophical conversations, but only the *Theaetetus* takes place in a world in which Socratic dialogues exist, and in which Socrates is known as a character in those dialogues. That is the world after Socrates; I would call it the world of the Academy; and the dialogue's setting at an unnamed gymnasium, for all we know the Academy, adds to the sense of this dialogue's seeking to include Socrates symbolically in that school, hence to position the Academy as the flowering of Socratism.[30]

But really the point about Socrates is independent of when Plato wrote the *Theaetetus*, or whether the dialogue refers to the nascent Academy. Those questions aside, this dialogue exerts itself to redefine the philosopher as a personage in history and within companies; and it invites and tries to settle the question of how to locate Socrates among such philosophers.

Socrates calls himself a philosophical midwife, as he does nowhere else in Plato's dialogues, with the intent of reinterpreting his famous

29 Plato *Theaetetus* 149a10.

30 On Theaetetus at the Academy see Proclus *Commentary on Euclid's Elements*, on Book I, and the unreliable *Suda*, as assessed in Zhmud (1998, 224, 226). The *Theaetetus* is an artifact: Euclides learned about this conversation and wrote it down, 142c–143b. The *Symposium* and *Parmenides* of Plato both begin with characters' delivering Socratic conversations from memory. (The *Phaedo* too, less stagily.) On written dialogues of philosophy, though not with Socrates in them, see Plato *Laws* 7.811c–e.

cross-examinations as elements of instruction. What struck suspicious eyes as loopy and antagonistic is a philosophical *technê* at work. Socrates practices philosophical midwifery. Theaetetus is pregnant, and Socrates can help him bring out the unformed thoughts he is carrying.[31]

Naturally and as any midwife would do Socrates scrutinizes new births. People have misunderstood him by imagining that scrutiny to be all he does. Not at all. As men are to women, so are souls to bodies, and the thoughts arriving out of men's souls to the infants that women's bodies produce. The true thoughts that men speak forth resemble healthy infants, while spurious ideas are like the weak child that ought to be exposed. A literal midwife no doubt told the mother about visible infirmities in the newborn baby; Socrates might have to tell the recently laboring father that a newly emerged idea is a fake and falsehood. People have seen Socrates disposing of those unfortunate births and falsely accused him of generating *aporia* "perplexity," much as one might mistakenly assume a midwife of infanticide if one only saw her exposing the rare unsound births.[32]

What looks like quarrelsome questioning reveals itself to have been instruction. People focused on the refutations and missed the larger enterprise they serve. You might as well call a cook someone who throws away burnt food just because every cook does that now and then. Similarly only an incomplete view of what Socrates does would make you call him an *aporia*-monger.[33]

## Socratic teaching

Can we call Socrates the first Platonist now, and rehabilitate his interrogative practice until it is pedagogy? In other works he denies trying to educate, which is one reason he charges no fee.[34] He calls himself a *muôps* "gadfly," an animal often identified with the Ephesians' mascot the *oistros.*[35] For that matter his

31 Plato *Theaetetus*: Socrates' *technê*, 149a7, 149a11, 150b6, 151b1; Theaetetus pregnant, 148e; midwifery, 149a–151d. The singularity and historical unreliability of Socratic midwifery is appreciated in Burnyeat (1977). For other discussions of the passage about a philosophical midwife, see Sedley (2004, 28–29), Tomin (1987), and Leitao (2012, 227–270). The question whether recollection implies midwifery is an old debate. For a summary of that debate, see Chrysakopoulou (2012, 97n23).

32 Plato *Theaetetus*: Socrates tells speaker the birth is fake, 150b9–c3; false accusations of making *aporia*, 149a8–9.

33 For discussion of the differences between Socratic cross-examination and his midwifery, see Brickhouse and Smith (2009, 184–186) and Giannopoulou (2013, 38–39).

34 For example, Plato *Apology* 19d–e, 31a–b, 33a–b; *Euthyphro* 3d; see Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.2.6–7. On Socratic teaching and related issues, see Blank (1985), Vlastos (1985), and Nehamas (1992).

35 Plato *Apology* 30e. Identification of *oistros* with *muôps*: Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* 655; *Suppliants* 307 (both times with reference to Io). Later authors distinguish sharply between the two flies, for example, Aelian *De Natura Animalium* 4.51, but this may be only a later (post-Aristotelian) distinction (Davies and Kathirithamby 1987, 161). In both cases the fly is considered blind (Moutsos 1980). But for a challenge to that view of the Socratic identity, see Marshall (2017).

resemblance to a satyr, a humanoid creature that always had animal parts, problematizes his standing among non-beast philosophers.[36] The *Republic* describes philosophers resembling Socrates whom it calls *automatoi* "spontaneous," as the *Theaetetus* calls the nonteaching Ephesians. And even in the present dialogue Socrates contrasts those who are *sophoi* with himself and Theaetetus, whom he calls *idiôtas* "private citizens."[37]

A second case of Socratic spontaneity is a more elusive thing to gauge; it might be better called his improvisation. In the cross-examinations found in those dialogues that typify Socratic *elenchus*, he responds to an interlocutor's statement, sometimes a chance remark, anyway a statement that Socrates could not have planned for. He probes what his co-conversationalists know about the term they used, be it friend, courage, beauty, or self-control. They improve their answers as they go but every definition fails, and the dialogues reach their closing *aporiai.*[38]

Socrates' questions bring their target down a peg, even when he is not talking to the puffed-up public figures he describes in the *Apology.* In the *Lysis* he speaks of *tapeinounta* "humbling" even friendly young Lysis.[39] More generally Socrates delegitimizes his interlocutor.

Deflating a would-be authority brings Ion to mind, although as Chapter 6 observed the dialogue named after him works differently from the typical dramas of perplexity. Where the aporetic dialogues show the failings of interlocutors' definitions (of courage, friendship, and so on) and consequently expose the interlocutors as ignorant, the *Ion* moves straight to exposing Ion's ignorance. Socrates takes the connotation of the aporetic dialogues and makes it this conversation's content; or takes the moral and makes it the fable.

In reply to the *Ion*'s foregrounding ignorance, the *Theaetetus* addresses itself to knowledge. The dialogue pursues successive definitions of a puzzling idea, Socrates pressing Theaetetus to say what *epistêmê* "knowledge" is, and Theaetetus laboring to answer. All the analyses founder, as they do in the aporetic dialogues.

And yet the *Theaetetus* does not communicate the feeling, found in those other dialogues, of someone's life proceeding normally until Socrates that force of nature interrupted and disabled it. Socrates meets the student of

36 Plato *Symposium* 215b, 216c–e; Xenophon *Symposium* 4.19.

37 On the *automatoi* see Plato *Republic* 7.520b; *Theaetetus* 180c. On the wise and the lay thinkers, *Theaetetus* 154d–155a. The context makes clear that the alternative to Socratic philosophizing is the sophist (Werner 2012, 33–34; Pavlou 2018, 188).

38 The standard examples of these dialogues are *Alcibiades I, Charmides, Euthyphro, Hippias Major*, and *Minor, Laches,* and *Lysis*. The closing *aporia* gives these dialogues the name "aporetic"; sometimes they are "zetetic" or inquiring works, after a category used (for an overlapping group of dialogues) in Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 3.49. Borderline cases include Plato's *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*, and would include Book 1 of the *Republic* if that stood alone. Note that this classification of some dialogues is agnostic about the order in which they were written.

39 Plato *Lysis* 210e.

Theodorus and decides to test him as students are tested, which is to say to test as teachers do. The question he presents Theaetetus with does not subvert what someone has asserted but launches a new exchange: He does not come upon Theaetetus philosophizing but comes *to* him. And so, appropriately, Socrates says twice at the *beginning* of his questioning *aporô* "I am bewildered; in a state of *aporia*." The *aporia*-dialogues bring their participants into that confused condition. The *Theaetetus* begins there, as if to say that dialectic does not serve the purpose of generating perplexity but rather does something else, perhaps overcome it.[40]

The self-conscious enactment here of a kind of questioning that had been improvised on other occasions suggests a formalized process of beginning philosophy. Even if Socrates came into his philosophical existence spontaneously he does not act as though Theaetetus should do the same, or could. Accordingly he lets himself look like a teacher. Theaetetus even resembles Socrates physically, as if in line to become another like him.[41]

The language for teaching is here. Besides referring to his midwife *technê*, Socrates describes his interactions with his young friends using the verb *suneimi* "to be with" and its related noun *sunousia*, along with the nearby verb and noun *suggignesthai* "get together with" and *suggenesis* "relation." These words all prefixed by *sun-* "with, together" stand out because Plato usually avoids this vocabulary where Socrates is concerned. The words appear in Xenophon in connection with Socrates and friends, but in Plato they denote organized gatherings in schools of sophists. The uncharacteristic terminology again moves Socrates into the teaching role he had denied.[42]

Academic practices of selecting students and imparting secrets to them also shows up here – yet again in ways atypical for Plato's dialogues – if not precisely as they operate for Protagoras. Socrates chooses some students, sends others away. He claims or pretends to claim that literal midwives engage in matchmaking, helping to initiate the pregnancy they will later guide to its conclusion. And as midwife to souls he sends away the young men who come to him who seem not to be *pôs* "somehow" *egkumones* "pregnant." Very cannily he introduces these men to others with whom they can be *suggenomenoi*, "associated intellectually" but also "joined in sexual intercourse," here using some of the same vocabulary for teacher and student, this time a word with a sexual second meaning. Impregnation, which has failed to occur to those who are not (in that way) pregnant, and which Socrates can't bring about by

40 Plato *Theaetetus* 145e. Andrea Nightingale shows that Platonic *aporia* changes in the middle-period dialogues. She does not discuss the *Theaetetus*, but what she says about *Meno* and *Republic* applies to it: *Aporia* is now "an epistemic perplexity that is instrumental … not a form of self-knowledge or ethical wisdom" (Nightingale 2010, 18).

41 Plato *Theaetetus*: Socrates teaching, 161d–e. Socrates calls what Protagoras does *didaskalia* "teaching" and seems to accept an equation of that work with his own. Theaetetus looks like Socrates, 143b, 144e.

42 Tarrang 2005: Xenophon uses the vocabulary for Socrates, 138n28; Plato for sophists, 133n11.

himself, will be effected by the contact with a professional teacher that goes by this sexually suggestive name.[43] However unusually, the matchmaking divides philosophical students from outsiders.

Socratic midwifery also shares in the secretiveness of schools. He urges Theaetetus not to tell other people about his true profession.[44] In the school of Protagoras, as *not* in the Ephesians' nonschool, students come to possess truths not available to others. The students of Parmenides know as no one else does what Zeno's writings are made to do. Socrates can claim to operate like other teachers, the difference being that what young men learn around him emerges from the secrecy in their own souls.

The midwife metaphor goes some way toward assimilating Socrates to the philosophical tradition and its schools. Setting aside the dialogues' other scenes without midwifery or secrets, with their denials of his teaching and comparisons to him like a Spartan whelp snooping around: Within this dialogue the language and the new image for cross-examination move Socrates toward the teaching profession. But if Plato wants to fix Socrates among other philosophers, his account falls short. Why does Socrates sketch out the great dialectic of philosophy's history to that point and then refuse to choose sides, rather watching while nature–philosophers and Eleatics tug-of-war? If those two legacies define philosophy, he is removing himself from the subject. And there is the nagging worry about the *koruphaios* Socrates describes, that exemplary philosopher – but also someone unlike Socrates in telltale particulars.[45]

The midwifery metaphor is unstable on its own terms as a rehabilitation for Socrates. Allegorically speaking it leaves Socrates still resembling Ion, from whose exemplification of human being the *Theaetetus* was supposed to offer an exception. Socrates takes after his mother herself a midwife; fathers are mainly absent from this dialogue; so that like Ion reabsorbed into mother Homer, Socrates has failed to individuate himself. And his identification with his (eventually) sterile mother extends to making him (essentially) sterile as philosopher.

As there was for Ion, there remains for Socrates a divide between him and his auditors that further suggests – in both cases – a failure to instruct. Ion felt delighted when his audiences wept and wept if they laughed; Socrates succeeds as midwife if his young friends show their fertility and deliver an

43 Plato *Theaetetus*: some are not *pôs* pregnant, 151b2–3; they associate with or have intercourse with others, 151b5; some with Prodicus, others with others, 151b6–7; Socrates himself sterile in wisdom, 150c4.

44 Plato *Theaetetus* 149a7–8.

45 Plato *Theaetetus*: Socrates outside the debate, 181a–b; the *koruphaios* different from Socrates, 174b–c. Although this passage makes the head philosopher resemble Socrates in, for example, their inefficacy in court, it also pictures that ideal type ignorant of his neighbors and of the way to the *agora*. Giannopoulou (2013: 98) correctly, in my opinion, concludes that Socrates is a "liminal" figure between the shrewd orator and the *koruphaios*.

idea, thus distinguishing themselves from him, while if they remain sterile like Socrates he sends them away.[46]

Allegorical incest aside, the sterility of the philosophical midwife prevents him from entering philosophy's genealogy. Socrates could not have been taught philosophy, for if he'd learned anything he would have possessed philosophical knowledge and thereupon been disqualified from midwifery. Nor can he produce midwives to follow him, thanks to the divide between him and those who hear him speak. After all, if Socrates succeeds as midwife, the students from whom he elicits truths become incapable of serving as midwives themselves. He claims to kill babies only incidentally to his greater enterprise of making new philosophers; but every new philosopher is a would-be midwife gone. Socrates succeeds as midwife only by cutting off the lineage of midwives.

Even when philosophy proceeds only with the midwives' help, it can't proceed with only them. On any plausible reconstruction of a philosophical genealogy, Socrates *qua* barren thinker remains outside philosophy's history as surely as (*qua* midwife) he belongs nearby and watching the genealogy proceed.

Finally, the midwife metaphor reengages a worry from earlier parts of this book. Somewhat as good love might exist yet be indistinguishable from bad love, and the ruling philosopher finally in power but to all appearances one more tyrant, so too as midwife Socrates may escape the predicament of the nonphilosopher in ways that nonphilosophers can't see. Unlike other school secrets, the secret of Socratic midwifery verges on being news that can't spread: an essential secret.

Suppose Theaetetus did try to pass the word along about Socrates the midwife. "Well [by way of explanation] it's *metaphorical* birth that he presides over"; but imagine who would be in a position to understand the metaphor let alone believe it, let alone see Socrates engaged in productive activity (and therefore not simply remaining identical with his mother). Socrates resolves the problem of needing to be sufficiently like his mother so as not to be *atopos*, yet different enough so as to have separated from her, by saying that he tends to souls where his mother treats bodies. And you know the difference between those two. The body enters into human perception, while thoughts about being and likeness and unlikeness and the rest take place in the soul alone.[47]

On the other hand, most philosophers have treated perception as the totality of knowledge. This amounts to saying that most philosophers have understood only the body. That's how "The human the measure" becomes

46 Fathers absent, Leitao (2012 258–267). Theodorus forgets the name of Theaetetus's father, Plato *Theaetetus* 144b. No one mentions Sophroniscus father of Socrates despite his name's appearing at Plato *Alcibiades I* 131e; *Euthydemus* 297e–298b; *Hippias Major* 298c; *Laches* 181a; see Xenophon *Hellenica* 1.7.15. Symbolically, the institutional father here – alleged source for Theaetetus's beliefs about knowledge – is the pointedly deceased Protagoras.

47 Plato *Theaetetus* 185e, on soul contrasted with bodily faculties.

"The pig the measure": For a theory like Protagoras's, all you need is an animal body. It takes a philosopher to possess the knowledge that the soul can examine in a manner separate from the body; and it takes a Socratic philosopher to understand that knowledge. The differentiation between body and soul belongs to true philosophy in a way that it's not available to others.

It follows that philosophers will find the difference obvious between Socrates and his mother, given that the difference depends on his attention to souls and hers to bodies. So philosophers recognize the difference between Socrates' successful emergence out of infantile identification and the arrested incestuous condition that the philosophers' opposites are in. In his role as midwife to the soul, Socrates must be able to tell soul from body. But by appropriating the distinction for philosophy, Socrates risks rendering the difference between philosophy and its opposites an opposition visible only from within philosophy. This tale won't be told out of school because no one outside the Socratic school will understand it.

## The gods of philosophy

Skip the niceties about how to portray Socrates then, and posit him as exceptional. The *Theaetetus* exists to pay tribute to him and his young body-double, and it acknowledges the lowness of the mean to which humans regress. The dialogue magnifies philosophers' difference from that low mean by depicting them seeking to achieve divine status. *This* is the act of imagining the exception.

But the imagination rarely works alone, and it does not tend to the details of the images it starts with. Expanding the epigraph to this book and questioning its wish (Plato's wish regarding Aster) to become *ouranos* "heaven," I asked what it means that the god scrutinizing earth from all sides also turns into the castrated god forced to retreat. Just as daydreams follow set paths no matter how freely we think we're thinking, so too embodying personal wishes in myths can leave the wishes at the myths' mercy, imagining as the story impels the imagining to go.

In previous chapters this caution led the argument to wonder what the soul's left and right hands might be, or whether the noble lie left room for a story within the city about the city's founding. The *Theaetetus* makes itself vulnerable to Greek mythology for a related reason. Plato lives, as his dialogues reflect (not always happily), in polytheism, where "god" carries ambiguities quite unlike the word's potential vagueness for monotheists.

Nature's philosophy begins with Homer and his reference to Ocean *genesis* of the gods. If nothing else this makes the tradition venerable. No poetic work was known to predate the *Iliad*. In fact nothing literally *predated* it, for on Herodotus's guess (exaggerated but probably typical for his time) Homer had composed his poems before the inauguration of the Olympics; and in classical Greek antiquity the years were counted by Olympiads.[48]

48 Herodotus lived roughly when Socrates did (commonly given dates for their births are 484 for Herodotus, 469 for Socrates). He says that Homer lived some 400 years before him,

The Homeric verse contains a peculiar water-cosmogony, from the Greeks' point of view, and probably a Mesopotamian borrowing.[49] But despite its exotic flavor Plato does not seem to be making a joke about the philosophical tradition. His time did refer to Ocean as an early being, and more than one source treats the name as a metaphysical not merely mythic entity.

For one thing, other dialogues cite Ocean as Heraclitean principle; the mocking references to Ocean in Herodotus indicate how widespread references to Ocean must have been.[50] And the Derveni Papyrus, a cryptic document apparently composed before Plato, independently associates Ocean with Heraclitean cosmologies, or theories meant to sound Heraclitean.[51] The sketchier evidence available about Pherecydes, from the century before Socrates, ascribes a part-mythic, part-philosophical theory to him about Ocean as a first principle of material nature.[52]

For his part Aristotle shows no sign of joking when he identifies the *Iliad* as possible start to all philosophy of nature, although for him it would anticipate Thales not Heraclitus. Thales was the first materialist, identifying the nature of things with water, but there are (Aristotle says) *tines* "some people" who believe that the ancients said something similar when they called Ocean and Tethys the parents of being.[53] Aristotle nearly dismisses that idea, calling it "unclear," but as this same passage says the myth-lover is *pôs* "in a way" a philosopher. Read charitably this word puts the myth-lover on the path to philosophy, maybe right before its beginning as a *potential* philosopher (the potential and the actual themselves being *hen pôs* "in a way one"). In the *Theaetetus* those with something ready to say are *pôs* pregnant; Protagoras's

"not more," *Histories* 2.53.2. The four-year cycle of Olympiads assumed a beginning to the Olympics in 776, 300 years before Herodotus. In fact Homer probably composed his poems late in the eighth century, after 776; how long after 776 the Olympics actually began is hard to say. So there might have been an Olympiad when he composed.

49 One sign of the cosmogony's non-Greek source is its inclusion of Tethys alongside Ocean. Greek poets did not feel obliged to mention Hera every time they spoke of Zeus, or Persephone with Hades. See Burkert (1992, 91–95); more cautiously Graf (1993, 90).

50 Ocean in Plato: *Cratylus* 402b–c; *Timaeus* 40e. The *Cratylus* passage again connects the *Iliad*'s verse with Heraclitus. Hesiod *Theogony* 133 is also invoked, and one or maybe two Orphic traditions now lost (D'Alessio 2004, 29). Ocean in Herodotus*: Histories* 2.19–23, 4.36.2, 4.8.2. Ocean "particularly troublesome" to Herodotus, Romm (1989, 100); also see Romm (1992, 33).

51 Derveni Papyrus: on Ocean (astonishingly interpreted as air), column 23, and see Janko (2001, 30); reference to Heraclitus as *hierologos* ("allegorist"?) column 4, and Janko (2001, 19); Sider (1997) – but for objections to this view of Heraclitus see Henrichs (2003).

52 Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 6.9; Pherecydes between myth and philosophy, Aristotle *Metaphysics* 14.4 1091b9. Herbert Granger (2007, 154) argues that Pherecydes distinguished natural entities like Ocean from gods.

53 Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1.3: Thales and water, 983b21–2; speculation about Ocean, 983b27–31. Mansfeld (1990) argues that this sentence is referring to Hippias, a common source for Aristotle and Plato: The plural pronoun *tines,* meaning there *are* some who call the passage philosophy, leaves open the possibility that Aristotle means Hippias and Plato together, in which case he is reading the *Theaetetus*.

cryptic "the human the measure" *pôs* says, just about says, that knowledge is perception; the fellow travelers of Protagoras are *pôs* ethical relativists.[54]

Socrates puts the beginning of natural philosophy with Homer. That philosophy claimed the world to have begun with Ocean. First divinity, first annunciation of the divine. The mythical being with whom nature began is the myth with which natural philosophy begins. The synchrony makes philosophy natural – some of it anyway, philosophy not in its exceptional manifestations: the philosophy that has dominated, opposed by the companions of Parmenides (whom we set aside[55]), but never yet stood at a distance from and judged.

Some philosophizing is old as the hills. In its natural state we might expect to find it sensory and changeable, sometimes wise but untutored. Insofar as they are godlike the philosophers of this type resemble Ocean the primordial shape-shifting water god. Here we find the changeable Ephesians, as we found the changeable Ephesian Ion who resembled the other fluctuant water god Proteus. We do *not* find the exceptional philosopher, unless by some odd means the natural were to become the exceptional.

But there is another god in this dialogue whom philosophers might aspire to resemble and among whom we might even find Socrates. She enters the *Theaetetus* at one turn in the conversation, significantly in a tangent to their talk about knowledge. Socrates asks Theaetetus a question and Theaetetus hesitates before answering. He has wondered what one might say – which is all Socrates needs to hear. Wonder? Perfect! Philosophy *begins* in wonder.

But those words are the proverbialized simplification of what Socrates says. "This the philosopher's passion, to wonder [*thaumazein*]; for no other beginning [*archê*] to philosophy but that. He who said Iris was the offspring to Thaumas did not genealogize badly."[56]

The first sentence boiled down over the centuries into a slogan about philosophy's beginning in wonder. In the process it lost ambiguity by acquiring a verb tense, for the original verbless sentence (where "to be" is implied in Greek) might be taken as saying either "There is no other *archê* to philosophy" or "There was no other *archê*." Did philosophy begin once long ago when someone wondered and continue ever since; or *does* it begin?[57]

If philosophy began in a moment of wonderment, one introduces a thinker like Theaetetus to philosophy by teaching him. He is welcome but

54 Aristotle *Metaphysics*: "unclear," 1.3 984b2; myth-lover in a way philosopher, 1.2 982b18–19; potential and actual, 8.6 1045b21. Plato *Theaetetus*: *pôs* pregnant, 151b2; Protagoras *pôs legei*, 152a7; Protagoras's fellow travelers, 172b8; see 165c4, 182a4.

55 Parmenidean philosophy is set aside at *Theaetetus* 184a, as if for the moment, and after the agreement to study both parties in the old dispute, 181a–b.

56 Plato *Theaetetus* 155d. The "He" is Hesiod: *Theogony* 255, 780.

57 That the statement can be read either way without sounding forced is implied by Aristotle's gloss at *Metaphysics* 1.2 982b12–14. He effectively repeats the sentence from Plato then explains that people philosophizing "both now and at first" begin or began in wonder.

late. A lot has already happened, and his teacher needs to explain the tradition. Philosophy began in wonder if it started with Homer's aphorism about the Ocean, or with a later thinker's wondering translation of Homer into the language of metaphysics.

If philosophy began, once upon a time, it may have led by inexorable dialectic to the present. On the other hand you might see the tradition as starting out then stalling, the disagreements in it admitting of no progress. George Boys-Stones presents the former as the standard reading of how Plato conceived the history of thought, with Eleatics on one side and Heracliteans on the other, Plato the synthesis that derives from their reunification. Boys-Stones argues for the contrary reading, that the two sides battle it out without *telos*.[58] What Socrates says here will not settle the question. Taking him to say "Wonder *was* the beginning" yields a minimal view of philosophy's history that is neutral between these alternatives. Whether advancing over the centuries toward Platonic metaphysics or stuck in tug-of-war, philosophy is a historical phenomenon.

One might object to the entire debate, though, if it requires that Socrates mean his unstated "to be" in the past tense; that is if a beginning for philosophy had to have taken place in the past. In fact and speaking ordinarily, in Plato's Greek or today's English, a beginning can be a standing possibility. Words like "wake" and "last" have multiple meanings in a more dramatic way, but "beginning" is multiple too. And if a beginning is an ongoing possibility one speaks of it in the present tense. "Good health begins with a sensible diet," not once historically to mark the end of disease-ridden epochs, but possibly many times over, in every life.

The verb in present tense lets *archê* mean not a temporal start but a timeless fundamental principle. You are stirred to philosophize when you appreciate with astonishment. Philosophy occurs spontaneously and likely as an exception.

Which beginning Socrates means, historical or spontaneous, may be illuminated in the sentence that follows, assuming we know how to read it. Hesiod rightly called Thaumas the father of Iris. This is supposed to mean, in a way, that *thaumazein* caused or causes philosophy. The god Thaumas personifies wonder, as his name indicates. But what makes Iris philosophy?

Socrates says nothing more about Iris. Has he withheld the allegorical account to prevent her being gossiped about as Ocean was? Teachers don't publicize what they know but reserve it for their initiated students. And it has proven hard for Plato's readers to come up with a direct explanation of this passage. Iris as goddess of the rainbow represents (on one interpretation) visual appearance – perception – what the Protagorean school has turned

58 Boys-Stones (2010). On the opposition between the history of philosophy and teleology see Collobert (2002).

philosophy into.[59] Or maybe philosophy mediates, after the fashion of Iris the herald, between human and divine. Or philosophy is divine and not (as Protagoras would have it) a human invention.[60] Sometimes she resembles Protagoras, sometimes the denial of him.

In the *Cratylus* Socrates traces the word *iris* to the verb *eirein* "to speak," appropriately for a goddess of message delivery.[61] And philosophers do speak. On the other hand, so does everyone else. But this etymology advances the discussion by selecting as Iris's defining trait her communication–function, not her appearance as rainbow and superficies, nor a specialized task like fetching water. As Iris's place in her family suggests, she moves to bring messages. Hesiod records Thaumas and Electra as parents of Iris, the Harpies as her sisters. Thaumas as son of the dangerous or "bad" god of deep waters, Pontus, belongs with the other freaks and marvels of an untamed nature. Within that exceptional crowd he and Electra, a daughter of Ocean, produce the predatory Harpies who come quickly to seize what humans have – or to spirit people away – and Iris their sister who is known (as the Harpies are) by the epithet "fleet-footed." Where the Harpies take human goods away, Iris comes to deliver news. The Harpies punish Phineas for betraying a secret of Zeus's, but Iris brings news from Zeus to people.[62]

Even in a parodic context Iris passes news along and does odd jobs. The character Iros in the *Odyssey* is a gluttonous beggar on Ithaca whom the suitors of Penelope keep around for their amusement, and whom Odysseus beats pitilessly. "All the young men called him Iros, because he used to run errands when anyone commanded him."[63] No rainbow, no criterion of truth, the man takes on this masculine form of Iris's name because he ferries messages. Homer can assume the traits of the goddess that earned the man his nickname. This is what goes without saying about Iris.

## The origins of Iris

Iris has a mixed parentage suited to her go-between functions. Socrates takes up the paternal side of the genealogy because of the echo of the word for

59 Burnyeat (1990, 277n12); and see Kenaan (2010, 170–171). This reading is intriguing but equates Iris with the rainbow alone. It also turns Socrates' compliment to Theaetetus into a complaint about the sham that philosophy is in the degraded present.

60 See Pavlou (2018: 184–185). Philosophy mediates, Stern (2008, 106). Philosophy divine, Polansky (1992, 96). For other readings, see Chrysakopoulou (2012: 96–97).

61 Plato *Cratylus* 408a3–4.

62 Harpies: sisters of Iris, Hesiod *Theogony* 265–266; all sisters fleet of foot, 266–269; carry people off, Homer *Odyssey* 1.241, 14.371, 20.78; the food of Phineas, Aeschylus *Phineas* frag. 142 = Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistai* 10.18.421, Aeschylus *Eumenides* 50; punishment for divulging prophecy, Apollonius *Argonautica* 2. Chrysakopoulou (2012: 95–96) points out the contrast between Thaumas and his brother Proteus. But to my mind, the sharper contrast appears among the children of Thaumas than between him and a sibling.

63 Homer *Odyssey* 18.6–7.

"wonder" in the name of her father, but Iris's mother Electra was a child of Ocean, whom Hesiod (unlike Homer) portrays as benevolent fresh water, and whom even Homer can associate with order and a moral universe.[64]

As Ocean's granddaughter, Iris issues from a natural order, rather than generating order as Ocean does. So do we say "Philosophy began near the beginning"? Andrea Tschemplik reads the genealogy as showing that motion is the beginning of philosophy.[65]

But Thaumas father of marvels came from the contrary first family founded by Pontus. Descended from both great water gods, Iris and her sisters result from the natural order but not by natural means.

This is how the natural becomes the exceptional: through a wondrous or monstrous event. Therefore the sisters all resemble freakish meteorological events, the Harpies like ill winds that blow things off the face of the earth, Iris an informative rainbow.

Thaumas's children still denote marvels in modern stories, as when a tornado's Harpyesque wind blows Dorothy over the rainbow into Oz. But non-Greek associations cloud the picture when they make the rainbow a promise of the end of floods, or a signpost to a pot of gold. Homeric rainbows are less cheery. Describing the breastplate of Agamemnon's armor, the *Iliad* refers to a rainbow as "*teras* to mortals," a portent or omen. Again in the *Iliad*, "Zeus stretches a purple rainbow out of heaven to be a *teras* for mortals either of war or of a chilly storm."[66] Zeus makes thunderstorms and sets a great war in motion, and a rainbow alerts human beings to both.

The semantic range of *teras* includes both "sign, portent" and "monster, freak." Athena wears a Gorgon's head, a *teras* that Homer also calls *pelôron* "outsized, prodigious."[67] (Compare our large unit of information the terabyte.) Greek authors frequently combine the words *teras* and *thauma* when referring to extreme phenomena, to reinforce that sense in which the daughter of Thaumas should be monstrous, or equivalently the sense in which wonder responds to monstrosity.[68]

Thus Iris brings news as a portent by virtue of being a freak. She serves the divine order as an alert to the will of Zeus, and she also disrupts the natural order as a monster or prodigy: an exception: something that should not happen. She signals an unknown divine will by means of what is unknown to

64 Hesiod *Theogony*: Iris's mother Electra, 265–266; Electra's father Ocean, 255–260; Pontus and his monster children, 270–336. Homer: Ocean and Tethys sheltered Hera, *Iliad* 14.202–204; perfect weather in Elysium thanks to Ocean, *Odyssey* 4.563–568. On the opposition between benevolent and monstrous genealogies beginning with Ocean and Pontus see Clay (1993).

65 Tschemplik (2008, 79).

66 Homer *Iliad: "teras* for mortals," 11.27; "purple rainbow out of heaven," 17.547–549.

67 Homer *Iliad* 5.741–742; see 12.202, 209 on a snake likewise both *pelôron* and a *teras.*

68 *Teras* and *thauma* together: *Iliad* 2.320–5 "we marvel" at a *teras;* Pindar *Pythian* 1.25–6, Mount Etna "a marvelous wonder [*teras … thaumasion*]; Herodotus *Histories* 4.28.2, among the Scythians a thunderstorm in winter *thômazesthai* "is wondered at" as a *teras;* Plato *Hippias Major* 283c *teras legeis kai thaumaston* "You are saying something freakish and marvelous."

nature. If nature is what you ought to expect, its messages are the predictable ones: rain tomorrow, winter ahead.

## The *teras* and the genealogy

Iris as *teras* finds a special welcome in the *Theaetetus,* whose treatment of the monstrous has been notably explored by John Sallis.[69] As *teras* she conveys meaning – in this respect she can stand behind a legacy of enlightenment – but other legacies are denied her.

Plato's dialogues mostly use *teras* as an unspecific metaphor denoting an odd idea.[70] But one passage means the word as something literal, as a reminder of its central sense. A king's son will be a king and the son of a good-looking man will be good-looking, except when *teras genêtai* "a *teras* comes to be."[71] In that case heredity fails.

The orator Aeschines, writing during Plato's lifetime, uses the word similarly when he summarizes a triple curse aimed at violators of an oath. Their land will bear no fruit; their women will bear *terata* instead of children who resemble their parents; their flocks will fail to reproduce naturally.[72] Among humans as among livestock and plants, these people will find reproduction subverted. That's what it means to have a *teras*.

The meaningful *teras*, or the *teras* as alert, implies a break from what has come before in the sense that any information worth communicating goes beyond what was already said and known. "The future will resemble the past" may technically count as a prediction, but when omens and auspices are at stake it is a forecast that no one will make a profession of stating, thanks to its being the default in human thinking. The future's resemblance to the past is what heralds arrive to deny.

Socrates has already declared the failure of reproduction to be the midwife's area of expertise, even spoiling his analogy to make the point. Unlike midwifing women who content themselves with checking to see that a baby is healthy and viable, Socrates looks closer still at an interlocutor's mental baby to verify that it exists. We don't want an *eidôlon* "image" or *anemaion* "windy, wind egg."[73] Meanwhile, and despite the literal underlying meaning of *maia* "midwife" which is "mother, old mother," Socrates himself has always been sterile. This is why I asked where a midwife might come from. Socrates threatens to look like a *teras* himself. Despite his denial of *atopia* here in the *Theaetetus*, the dialogues show people calling him *atopos,* and he himself equates the *atopos* with the *teras.*[74]

69 Salllis (1995, 2005).

70 Plato: *Euthydemus* 296c; *Parmenides* 129b; *Phaedo* 101b; *Philebus* 14e; *Protagoras* 91d.

71 Plato *Cratylus* 393b, 394a.

72 Aeschines *Against Ctesiphon* 3.111.

73 Plato *Theaetetus*: *eidôlon*, 150d; *anemaion*, 151e.

74 Plato: Socrates *atopos*, *Gorgias* 494d; *Symposium* 221d; the *atopos* a *teras*, *Phaedrus* 229e. On the *atopia* of Socrates vis-à-vis his divine sign see Destrée (2005, 64).

The dream authority Artemidorus will write that because midwives look for hidden things, the dream of a midwife means news is coming.[75] So to the extent that philosophy is midwifery it brings news or signals that news is on its way, as an outlandish being or *teras* would do; which is to say, like Iris.

A psychoanalytic treatment of Greek god-families leads to a similar conclusion. Richard Caldwell finds the common element among those imprisoned in Tartarus to be sexual violations against Zeus the father. That Tantalus and Sisyphus receive their punishments for having revealed "secrets of the gods" points toward the thought that "the 'secrets' of the gods are in fact the secrets of the parents, specifically the secrets of parental sexuality."[76] By the same logic, that the Harpies persecute Phineas for disclosing Zeus's secrets suggests that these castrating "phallic mothers" likewise bar the little boy from discovering where babies come from.[77] The Harpies' contrasting sister Iris, swift of foot like her sisters but oppositely directed to *divulge* news from Zeus, therefore reads as the stupendous announcement of parentage.[78] (A rainbow presages thunderstorms in Homer, and Zeus's lightning bolts express the power of his fecundity, as Semele's fate demonstrates.) Iris thus accompanies and tells of a birth without being one of the new child's parents. She functions as a midwife.

Midwifery aside, Socrates evokes Iris through a Homeric association that Plato would have known well. Socrates jokes about having been beaten by heroes such as Heracles and Theseus.[79] Homer's Odysseus has a reputation for brawling too, unusually among epic heroes. He humiliates Thersites in the *Iliad*,[80] and in the *Odyssey* he beats the beggar Iros.

Asking how Iris represents philosophy led to as much confusion as it did because it is not philosophy as a whole that Iris stands for but Socrates. He is the wonder; Theaetetus may yet become a Socrates, as he looks to become, as long as he wonders – not by magical birth but spontaneously. (Theodorus had begun the dialogue speaking of his marvelously good nature.[81])

As the Iris of philosophy Socrates was born to herald the nonbirths that the *Theaetetus* calls monstrosities of a philosophical education. Not merely intellectual habit or a yen for clear thinking puts Socrates in this position. If his midwifing accounts for his reputation as *atopôtatos,* then what locates him outside the genealogy of normal philosophy and judging it also makes him

75 Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 3.32. Along the same lines Chrysakopoulou (2012, 97–98) brings out the ties between wonder and the pangs of childbirth.

76 Caldwell (1989, 136).

77 Harpies: persecuting Phineus, "Apollodorus" *Library* 1.9.21; Apollonius *Argonautica* 2.178–239; phallic mothers, Caldwell (1989, 153).

78 I find a different but very perceptive contrast between Iris and her sisters – the only other treatment I know of that seeks to understand her through that opposition – in Rubenstein (2008, 11–12).

79 Plato *Theaetetus* 169b.

80 Homer *Iliad* 2.265–275.

81 Plato *Theaetetus* 144a2.

look odd. His absurd appearance itself harbingers the news of a philosophical failure to reproduce. In his capacity as *atopos*, Socrates is the *teras* come to announce a *teras*. As Iris's meteorological unpredictability announces that (other) unforeseen events lie ahead, Socrates' standing outside the reproductive sequence equips him to herald breaks in that sequence. If Socrates refrains from rendering the genealogy of Iris into a philosophical slogan, that may be because what makes Iris philosophy makes philosophers monsters.

## Exceptional philosophers

The Iris-midwife, Socratic philosophy as *teras,* suggests an impossible sequence of *teras* philosophers each bringing the news that philosophy has once more failed to reproduce itself. Ephesian philosophy undermines philosophical reproduction through teaching by springing up naturally; Protagoras by teaching (as relativist) that everyone is already right about everything; Socratic midwifery as an activity distinct from reproduction.

When philosophers approach divinity, the problem only half finds a solution. For nature–philosophers whose oceanic god symbolizes the world's protean processes, divinization might happen as a matter of course. Some philosophers happily can flow along in nature's stream. But on the alternative becoming like Iris means entering a genealogy of the congenitally exceptional. All fathers gone from view, philosophy needs to keep being born contrary to the natural order.

Within the dramatic action of the prologue the crisis finds embodiment in the literal disappearance of philosophers. The court is about to end Socrates' *scholê* and what he has in place of a school, what is in a way his teaching; and now Theaetetus is almost gone too. Will philosophy last? The category of the purely exceptional or monstrous is too open and empty (not to mention negative) to sustain a theory of the philosopher. You can't just posit the existence of the exception. The challenge posed by Ion and his type still stands, and demands the direct approach that the next two dialogues intend to supply.

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# 8 The *Sophist*

## The sophist with and without philosophy

The *Sophist* returns to the concerns of Plato's *Ion*.[1] This time the point is to establish the philosopher's opposite in a definition rather than a portrayal, so that the essence of the philosopher can emerge by contrast with that figure. People confuse sophists with philosophers, and the right account of sophistry will measure the conceptual distance between them.

This dialogue specifically shares with the *Ion* a wish to mix philosophy's opposites or enemies together into an all-purpose other. Where Ion combines the general's pomposity with the poet's inarticulateness and an artisan's naïve confidence about professionalism, the sophist who begins the *Sophist* a trainer in verbal trickery ends up also looking like the bad kind of poet – he practices the mimetic arts – and even shows himself to associate with, of all things, nonbeing, a denial of philosophy if there ever was one.

### Philosophy's *xenos*

Yesterday's agreement to meet again has reunited Socrates and Theodorus, along with the young men Theaetetus and the Socrates who is his friend. Between that conversation and this one, the older Socrates has evidently gone to hear the charges against him. Anyone would have passed a worried night after being indicted on a capital offense, and would have arrived the next day preoccupied with his case. But Socrates isn't anyone. Crito will soon discover him in jail awaiting execution sound asleep; we may expect that he also slept soundly after hearing the charges read, too.

Nor does Socrates mention the coming trial, unless he is raising the question of the sophist aware that Athenians see him as such a creature, and he seeks some definitive argument he can make before the jury – "proof, gentlemen, that I am not a sophist." Socrates might have imagined against all evidence that side-by-side analyses of sophist and philosopher could sway a jury.

1 A paper related to this chapter, "The Story that Philosophers will be Telling of the Sophist," was presented at a workshop on Plato's *Sophist* that Burt Hopkins organized at the University of Seattle in 2012. That paper became Pappas (2013). It has since moved through several revisions and points of disagreement with the original version.

(More likely Plato writing years later might have wished that Socrates had had this superior analysis available to defend himself with, as the rhetorical skill behind the *Menexenus* reveals a wish that Socrates could have orated.) In any case the inquiry remains unfinished: The *Sophist* and its successor dialogue the *Statesman* both look ahead to the *Philosopher*, a dialogue promised as their sequel, but the *Philosopher* never comes to be.[2]

The group has done more than just meet again. An unnamed *xenos* joins them from the Italian city of Elea, an associate of the philosophers based there. The man is only ever called *xenos*; in English translations he tends to appear as the Eleatic Stranger, though sometimes "guest" or "visitor." The Greek *xenos* carries a range of meanings, from "stranger" and non-native, even foreigner, to "guest" and participant in rituals of hospitality, hence often an informal representative from another city, therefore even a friend. The Sophoclean tragedy *Philoctetes* draws attention to this range. Its characters use *xenos* neutrally to mean "stranger," positively as a guest, and in a hostile sense suggesting enmity. As a rule the relationship worked reciprocally. Making someone your *xenos* amounted to making yourself a *xenos* to that person; thus gifts were typically not merely given but exchanged. (The *xenos* in this dialogue himself classifies gift-giving as exchange.)[3]

Calling the *Sophist*'s new character a "stranger" rightly keeps the mysteriousness of his identity in view. On the other hand it omits the sense of special relationships, family history, and legal representation that can be implied by *xenos.* This chapter and the next one will refer to him by the untranslated word, frequently abbreviated *X*, so as not to rule out any of the meanings that would have resonated with Plato's first readers.

That the associations of *xenos* matter is indicated by the Homeric tags or quotes contributed by the *Sophist*'s characters, which reach back to epic to reiterate cultural wisdom about guest–strangers. For example Socrates welcomes *X* with an invocation of Odysseus in the cave of the Cyclops Polyphemus, when Homer has Odysseus present himself as supplicant and fresh arrival. He tells Polyphemus that Zeus is *xeinios*, god of guests and strangers. "The gods accompany whichever human beings share [*metechousin*] in shame and justice," Socrates says more or less paraphrasing Homer.[4]

Socrates jumps to a later scene from the *Odyssey* to amplify the unknownness of the *xenos*. On the island of Ithaca Antinous is warned by a fellow suitor not to mistreat Odysseus. Gods disguise themselves sometimes and "visit cities." A *xenos* could be anybody at all: Odysseus appears before

2 Plato: yesterday's agreement, *Sophist* 216a; Socrates asleep before execution, *Crito* 43b–c; promised sequel dialogue, *Sophist* 216c–217b, 253c–254b; *Statesman* 257a–c, 258b.

3 For uses of *xenos* see for example, Xenophon *Hellenica* 4.1.34. Sophocles *Philoctetes*: *xenos* used neutrally, 135, 219; meaning "guest," 303, 404; with enmity, 791 (Belfiore 1993/94). Eleatic calls giving *allaktikê* "exchange," Plato *Sophist* 223c.

4 Plato *Sophist* 216b1; see Homer *Odyssey* 9.270–271. On parallels between *Odyssey* 9 and *Philoctetes*, see Levine (2003); on *xenos* in both passages see Levine (2003: 19–21).

Polyphemus without a name, on Ithaca as a beggar. But to the suitors, a god in disguise would be Iros, nicknamed after the herald of Zeus because he ran errands (as seen in Chapter 7). The suitors acknowledge gods only in parody. Socrates will ignore their impiety as he rejects Polyphemus's inhospitable welcome, but the Homeric references do plant an idea in his head. For all they know this new man is "some god of cross-examination."[5]

Theodorus answers that their visitor does not engage in *eris* as others do. Is this to distinguish *X* from sophists, or also from Socrates? Either way he's no *theos* "god" though surely *theios* "divine." "That's how I address philosophers," Theodorus says with Socrates' approval, both of them remembering the previous day's digression about philosophers' aspiring to divine status. Philosophers exceed humanity.

But Theodorus speaks as though he thought a philosopher was easier to identify than a god is, and Socrates brings him up short. Sophists and politicians routinely pass for philosophers. How do you tell which is which? He sets the question before *X* as a challenge of counting or accounting: Do statesman, sophist, and philosopher add up to three human species, or two, or one? The proposed three conversations to come will separate the philosopher from the two types who pass for philosophers without sharing in philosophical exceptionality.[6]

## Diomedes and Glaucos

After *X* has gone through successive definitions of the sophist and reached one he finds workable, he concludes the dialogue with another Homeric text about what makes a *xenos*. *X* sums up the definition and declares: "Whoever says the real sophist is 'of this genealogy and bloodline' will speak most truly."[7]

The words *tautês tês geneas te kai haimatos* "of this genealogy and bloodline" precisely repeat a phrase from Book 6 of the *Iliad*. In that passage the Trojan warrior Glaucos has just faced off against the Achaean Diomedes, and Diomedes – who previously stabbed a god – requests the stranger's history to make sure this one is mortal. Glaucos harks back to his grandfather the hero Bellerophon, telling what became of Bellerophon and his children. "This is my blood and ancestry."[8]

The words make peace. Diomedes realizes that the two of them have a *xenos*-relationship. His own grandfather Oeneus once hosted Bellerophon; he recalls the gifts they gave each other. The *Iliad* will return to this Oeneus

5 Plato *Sophist*: "visit cities," 216a5–b2 (reference to Homer *Odyssey* 17.486); "god of cross-examination," 216b.

6 Plato *Sophist*: *X* not quarreler, not god but divine, 216b7–9; "I address," 216c1; types mistaken for philosophers, 216c–d; one, two, or three types, 217a.

7 Plato *Sophist* 268d.

8 Homer *Iliad* Book 6: Diomedes tells the stranger to tell his history, 119; maybe a god, 129; Glaucos tells of Bellerophon, 156–205; declared genealogy, 211.

in a flashback about the legendary Calydonian boar and Oeneus *ageiras* "collecting" heroes to hunt it down. For now Diomedes proposes that he and Glaucos find other enemies to kill – they have no quarrel with each other – and the two exchange their armor to refresh the *xenos*-relationship. Glaucos must have been addled by Zeus (says the narrator), because he traded gold armor worth a hundred oxen for the bronze armor of Diomedes worth only nine.[9]

The episode deserves spelling out despite the few words with which *X* alludes to it, because it contains a classic depiction of *xenia* "guest–friendship" relations in Homer. The episode interrupts Hector's return to Troy after a long day of fighting and corpse-looting, offering an image of the order that might govern human affairs if not for war.[10] (Ancient audiences would have thought immediately of the Trojan War's origin in a violation of *xenia*, when Paris though guest of Menelaus absconded with his wife.) *Xenos*-relations work this way, with credentials offered on both sides, and acts of generosity.

Besides its observation on what makes a *xenos* the *Iliad* episode connects with Plato's *Sophist* in the noble wish to tell humans from gods; in its reference to a great hunt; in the effort to pin down a possible enemy's identity. A reader today also might recall what Plato's contemporaries would not have failed to think, that Diomedes was one of the Epigoni or later descendants of heroes. *X* belongs among the Eleatic philosophers but not with their first generation, so you might call him one of the Eleatic Epigoni.[11] The two even share Italian locations, for early traditions have Diomedes migrating west after the Trojan War and founding cities in Italy near Elea.[12]

*X* says "genealogy and blood" with the confidence of appropriation that often appears in Plato's dialogues when they take over their source material. By following death with reincarnation, the myth of Er turns Homer's post-script to heroism into a prelude to philosophical politics. The funeral speech in the *Menexenus* takes the famous speech by Pericles anticipating enhanced Athenian empire, and reimagines it as valedictory to the Athenian empire.[13]

9 Homer *Iliad*: Diomedes about his grandfather, 6.215–226; Oeneus collecting heroes, 9.544; Diomedes proposes exchange, 6.230; relative values of armor, 6.235–236. This exchange seems to have become proverbial for a bad bargain: Plato *Symposium* 219a. On the Homeric narrator's amusement, and for discussion of the scene, see Harries (1993).

10 On the looting of corpses see Nestor's war cry at Homer *Iliad* 6.66–71.

11 Diomedes among Epigoni, Pausanias *Description of Greece* 2.20.5; Hyginus *Fabulae* 71; "Apollodorus" *Library* 3.7.2. The *xenos* epigone to Parmenides, Plato *Sophist*: companion to companions of Parmenides and Zeno, 216a; what Parmenides said "when we were children," 237a; "father Parmenides," 241d.

12 On Diomedes in Italy see Lycophron *Alexandra* 594ff.; Strabo *Geography* 5.1.8–9, 6.3.9; Pliny *Natural History* 3.16. The cities Diomedes founded included Benevento and Brindisi. Benevento lies about 100 miles from Elea, which is a bit more than the distance between Athens and Thebes but less than that from Athens to Sparta.

13 On Er, see Chapter 5 above. On this reading of the *Menexenus* see Pappas and Zelcer (2015).

A close parallel to the *Sophist* occurs in the *Republic*'s noble lie, as Chapter 4 argued. The lie transforms the *genê* "generations, ages" from Hesiod's *Works and Days* into coeval human *genê* "types, classes" that occupy the city simultaneously. The lie takes over poetry by denying its temporality; and here, when *X* announces the discovery of the sophist's "genealogy" (from the same root), he means not the parentage one comes from by birth but the natural kind a sophist emerges from, in the logical sense in which species comes from genus. It is genealogy without chronology.

Meanwhile the reference to *haima* "blood" turns literal and again nontemporal. Where it had been a common metaphor for ancestry – Glaucos's bloodline harking back to Bellerophon – it becomes something close to what we call DNA, a property existing now of the existing individual.

The reference to Oeneus in *Iliad* Book 9 adds another conceptual takeover. In the method of definition that *X* teaches Theaetetus and practices throughout the *Sophist*, one begins with a very general category and divides and redivides it until reaching the species being sought. The *Phaedrus* names this first step, requiring that one *agein* "collect" the phenomena to be distinguished.[14] X has practiced conceptual collection where the grandfather of Diomedes brought heroes together for a hunt, again as it were showing the Homeric words of narrative what they ought to have been saying.

The Eleatic *xenos* has only overlooked one element of this episode from Homer, and that is the episode's purpose and point: the *xenos*-relation. The bloodline of Glaucos inspires a peaceful interlude during a bellicose stretch of war, as well as the reflection that *xenos*-relations properly respected would have obviated the need for war to begin with. As *xenos* one makes and preserves peace even friendship. The Homeric tag hanging unanswered within the philosophical dialogue invites the possibility that the *xenos* may yet find common ground with the sophist.

## Philosophy and method

Even though the definition of philosophers has been deferred to that impossible sequel dialogue, the *Sophist* begins showing what a philosopher might be, frequently along lines not seen in other dialogues. *X* brings an institutional identity into philosophy that the *Theaetetus* inclined to (as in its portrayal of the *koruphaios* or head philosopher), but that the dialogues featuring Socrates largely rule out.

Above all *X* practices a method. He defines his object of inquiry, whether sophist or statesman, by starting with the larger genus that will contain that object and then dividing the genus repeatedly. Only a few dialogues refer to collection and division; only in one of them does Socrates speak of it (and even there, he seems more admirous from afar than engaged in the practice);

14 Plato *Phaedrus* 265d3–4.

only here in the *Sophist* does anyone first go through a sample division, when *X* shows Theaetetus how to define angling.[15]

*X* presents himself personally as a methodical, official philosopher. His standing as epigone to Parmenides makes him loyal enough that he speaks of "father Parmenides" even when parting ways with Eleatic philosophy. Theodorus introduces him as a "companion of the companions of Parmenides and Zeno." The word *sunousia* appears again in this dialogue to mean philosophical association, as Chapter 7 observed that it does in the *Theaetetus*. In Plato the word more usually refers to sophists, but *X* uses it here in connection with collected philosophers – even if, to be sure, he also speaks of sophists' *sunousia*.[16]

As a trained philosopher *X* does not pretend that philosophy is in some sense just people talking; as if one person happened to make an assertion and he would curiously ask what the person meant. When asked to look into the three figures philosopher, sophist, and statesman, he considers whether to proceed solo in a lecture or in back-and-forth questioning with an agreeable interlocutor. From the looks of things he does not struggle with rivals or humble pretenders to wisdom. That kind of questioning belongs in the street; the pliant respondent *X* asks for is the type to be found in a classroom. It makes sense that he begins with Theaetetus, whom Plato's readers have already met in the role of student. It also makes sense that *X*'s offer of a choice between methods should echo the scene in Plato's *Protagoras* in which Protagoras proposes to explain virtue either in a speech or with a story. Whatever else he is, Protagoras is a teacher, and teachers come before their students with different strategies of presentation.[17]

The echo of Protagoras reveals something else about *X*'s method. He resists storytelling. Protagoras had offered either *logos* or *muthos* "story, tale, myth," not mentioning an exchange of questions and short answers. Socrates muscled him toward that third option with an effort that said Protagoras had not merely overlooked but was refusing that way of expressing his position.[18] By contrast *X* welcomes the philosophical back-and-forth or can give a *logos*; in his case the possibility refused in the choice proffered is the option of *muthos*.

*X* complains even about the great Eleatic Parmenides for telling stories. It is an extreme complaint. By Plato's time and even before, Greek thinkers had begun voicing their impatience with myths. The impatience with particular myths is made clear in the dialogues; and before Plato, Herodotus had

15 Method spoken of in Plato *Phaedrus, Sophist, Statesman*. *Phaedrus*: Socrates calls himself fond of the method, 266b; describes *agein* "collection," 265d3–4; *palin … diatemnein* "redivision," 265e1. *Sophist*: sample definition, *Sophist* 218e–221a.

16 Plato *Sophist*: *X* among companions of Parmenides, 216a; *sunousia* of philosophers, 217e1; of sophists, 232c7.

17 Plato: choice of methods by *xenos*, *Sophist* 217c–218a; by Protagoras, *Protagoras* 320c.

18 Plato *Protagoras* 328e–329b.

begun saying *muthos* as one says "myth" in casual English today, to mean "falsehood" or "misconception." But the Eleatic tradition that *X* belongs to dominates ancient intellectual opposition to myths as both untrue and pernicious. Xenophanes pressed the case against polytheism's stories; in the generation after Plato it would be Palaephatus (apparently a student of Aristotle's) who demythologized most rigorously, and he cited Melissus against the myth-lover's trust that the past could have differed from the present. "What came into being still exists and will exist hereafter [*en archêi estin ha egeneto, kai nun estai*]."[19]

*X* turns the Eleatics' accusation back against them. The Eleatics themselves made stories of their ontology. Teachers in an earlier age addressed their followers as if they were children, explaining being in language of friendship and enmity. Mama and Papa Being have themselves a time, then settle down to make becoming little *tokous* "babies."[20]

The stricture on stories informs the *Sophist*'s version of the philosophical tradition. As in the *Theaetetus*, and as nowhere else in Plato's corpus, a character sums up the history of philosophy so that it plays out an ongoing debate between irreconcilable theories. The *Theaetetus* had traced the cosmology of nature's fluctuations through Heraclitus to Homer and Epicharmus, with Parmenides and Melissus cast in the role of countertradition.[21] *X* now likewise sorts philosophers into two camps. Again one side contains the people of Parmenides, here "friends of the Forms." Against them *X* puts a group of what sound like atomists.[22] This history however contains no poets. "Earthborn"

19 Plato: suspicion of myths, *Republic* 2.377b–378e, *Euthyphro* 6a; dissatisfaction with allegorical readings, *Republic* 2.378d. Interpretation and the old suspicions of myth, Brisson (2004, 5–40). Herodotus on myth as falsehood, *Histories* 2.23, 2.4.5 (Baragwanath and de Bakker 2012, 11–19). Ancient demythologizers include the historians of Athens before Thucydides, Atthidographers, who explained mythical beings away (Pearson 1942). Euhemerus of Messene, born not long after Plato's death, is famous for the theory (later "euhemerism") that those worshiped as gods were once kings who instituted cults of themselves. For a reappraisal, see De Angelis and Garstad (2006). Eleatics: Xenophanes as Eleatic, Plato *Sophist* 242d; Melissus Eleatic, *Theaetetus* 180e, 183e. Palaephatus citing Melissus, *On Unbelievable Tales* chapters 1, 28 (Stern 1996). "What came into being," etc., is the translation in Stern (1996, 29); more literally: "In the beginning is what came to be, and it will still be." See nearly the same principle quoted in Simplicius *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 162.23–24.

20 Plato *Sophist*: "One says there are three beings [*onta*], some of them warring with one another, and then making friends and having weddings and babies and feeding the children," 242d–e; one such speaker might say that "the many or one or two *are* or *became* or *are becoming*," 243b; *tokous* "babies," 242d2.

21 Plato *Theaetetus* 152e–153d. Socrates also aligns Heraclitus with Homer's verse about Ocean at Homer at *Cratylus* 402a–c, but he does not lay out a larger tradition containing the two, let alone a rival to that tradition.

22 Plato *Sophist* 246a–247e. The insistence on matter is everywhere in this description, so it might seem like enough to call them materialists; but these people additionally want to fragment bodies into the smallest particles, 246c.

the opponents of the Forms may be,[23] but at least their bloodline remains pure. The ongoing battle of ideas proceeds in prose.

The pruned history contrasts with the sample history in the *Theaetetus* but also with what we know about earlier chronicles compiled by Gorgias, Protagoras, and Hippias.[24] Hippias is reported to have brought together ideas from Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod, Homer, and "the prose works of Greeks or barbarians."[25] Against such inclusiveness the philosopher from Elea proposes a narrowed sense of philosophy and in particular a philosophy without narrative voices in it.

## Limitations of the definitions

Even with method in hand and institutional history at his back, *X* guides a conversation that in one way duplicates Socratic cross-examinations. A classic example of such conversations, like Euthyphro's exchange with Socrates in the dialogue named after him, is marked by its restarts. Socrates asks what piety is and Euthyphro offers an answer, but it fails. Euthyphro comes up with another answer and that fails too. His proposals improve, in fact you could make the case that each proposal improves upon the preceding one, but never enough to protect against the Socratic refutation.

The *Sophist* contains no contributions from a pompous interlocutor nor any refutations, and yet its conversation does keep starting over. *X* and Theaetetus arrive at seven definitions of the sophist before *X* declares them finished. Each new start looks for a different genus or larger set to subdivide and find the sophist in, even when nothing seems to have failed in the previous definition. They must go on, they needn't go on, they go on.[26]

The problem each time must derive not from flaws in the methodology, because the methodology does not change as they go; nor from errors in the subdividing distinctions that *X* draws. The first analyses dwell on the anthropology or sociology of the sophist before taking on metaphysics for the last and greatest definition. Maybe the number of definitions is the fault of the Sophist himself and proof of his phantasmagoric nature, elusive because contradictory and manifold.[27] Philosophers can define sophistry all day

23 Plato *Sophist*: *X* calls the materialists *gêgeneis* "earthborn," 248c1–2; *spartoi te kai autochthones* "sown and earthborn [as the Phoenicians had been], always of this land," 247c4–5.

24 Tell (2011, 3–6).

25 Quoted in Clement *Stromata* 6.2.15.2, perhaps from Hippias *Synagoge*.

26 On the number of definitions proffered see Bluck (1975, 53) and Brown (2010).

27 On this problem see Notomi (1999, 80) and Gill (2016). On Plato's effort to contain the range of meanings in the sophist see Vegetti (2004, 98). Rickless (2010) presents a rival reading: Where other commentators treat the initial definitions as contingent or partial, Rickless's readings makes them turn out false. If forced to choose between those options, I would say that the first definitions are better than false but worse than partial. They undermine the effort to expel or marginalize the sophist vis-à-vis the philosopher.

without progress or satisfaction unless they ask what manner of being is able to present so many appearances.

For *X* as for other Platonic characters, a multiplicity of appearances bespeaks *mimêsis* at work.[28] Sophistry and poetry join together as manifestations of deception. But the *mimêsis* that implies false statement makes an illusion or phantom (*eidôlon*) and false assertion seem to mean assertions about what is not, where that refers impossibly to what doesn't exist, what is nothing. So the dialogue works through what what-is-not might be, arriving at that which is other to being.[29]

If the last definition does not merely correct the earlier ones but supplants and somehow accounts for them, there is no need to imagine an *aporia* behind the multiplicity of initial analyses. But between the first five and the final one comes a more worrisome case: the sophist who cross-examines. The arrogantly ignorant are best corrected by the teaching that questions them and exposes their ignorance. It is interrogation as *katharsis* "purgation." This passage uses general-enough terms for the disputatious conversation to let it portray either the savage word play that sophists were known for, known as eristic, or the cross-examination that Plato's readers find Socrates practicing. Either way the outcome instructs the student, and *X* calls this species a sophistry *genei gennaia* "of noble origin, of a noble kind."[30]

Later *X* teases Theaetetus that they risk discovering the philosopher first in their quest for the sophist, but that is only a trick. Obscurity of essence makes a sophist hard to understand, while the difficulty in conceptualizing a philosopher follows from the extreme clarity or brightness of the philosophical nature.[31] In the case of the cathartic questioner, though, *X*'s description fits Socrates and sophist alike.

Since the middle of the twentieth century the threat implied here to any project of defining the philosopher has been given competing explanations. Does Plato mean to acknowledge the Athenians' impression of Socrates as a sophist, or is this a new step in Platonic philosophy as distinguished from the old Socratic method? Will the dialogues go on to separate the figures it runs together here —which makes the ambiguous portrayal a feint – or does even the final definition threaten to capture Socrates and sophists together?

28 Plato: Socrates on *mimêsis* and doing more than one thing, *Republic* 3.394e; the Athenian *xenos* on dramatic *mimêsis* and multiple characters, *Laws* 4.719c.

29 Plato *Sophist* 240a–241b.

30 Plato *Sophist*: those saying nothing, 230b; cross-examination and purgation, 230c–d; noble kind, 231b8–9. Debates over Aristotle's use of *katharsis* at *Poetics* 6, 1449b27 have shown the limitations of "purgation" as a translation of the word's metaphorical use (Golden 1992, 15–20; Scott 2003). Objections by Golden and Scott notwithstanding, *X*'s elaborated medical analogy in this passage, with its talk of removing blockages, makes clear that here at least something comparable to an emetic or laxative is meant, that is, a purgative.

31 Plato *Sophist*: risk finding philosopher, 253c; obscurity and brightness, 254a–b.

Or have all these interpretations missed the point, this sixth proposal never having been meant as a definition to begin with?[32]

The sophist of the sixth definition questions and refutes, as *X* appears not to do but as Socrates surely does. So the easiest reply to this section of the dialogue keeps the focus on Socrates, even (as in some interpreters' proposals) separating him from philosophers as they should be truly understood. That approach would insulate the passage from posing a threat to philosophy as such. But the possibility has now come up that *X* will not after all be able to tell a philosopher from a sophist, so that sophists will carry on passing for philosophers. The two are as different as dogs and wolves, the *xenos* says, wildest animal from tamest – but then Theaetetus has already had trouble distinguishing tame from wild.[33]

The dialogue's recurring metaphor of the hunt complicates the task of telling wild from tame. For that matter it blurs the differences between philosopher and sophist. *X* first mentions hunting in his sample division, starting with animal-hunting in order to arrive at angling. Soon he makes the sophist someone who hunts tame animals and hunts for a wage; later reverses the metaphor so that the sophist is a beast, therefore something to be pursued in the philosophers' *thêra* "hunt," seized, and grabbed.[34] A wild animal is the kind you hunt, which is why one Greek word for hunt, *thêra*, comes from *thêrion* "beast."

But then the wild animal itself also hunts. That's where its food comes from. Other dialogues may associate the philosopher with some variety of hunting, but the word's double edge prevents it from distinguishing philosophers from sophists.[35]

## The sophist's money

The distinction between wolf and dog may not permit a stable definition of sophistry (or, therefore, of philosophy), but it draws attention to a specific

32 Socrates as sophist: Edmunds (2006); "It was Plato who made a *philosophos* out of a sophist … whose name was Socrates" (Rossetti 2018, 295). New step in Platonic philosophy: Kerferd (1954, 85) and Taylor (2006, 166–167). A feint: Trivaskis (1955) and Guthrie (1978, 128–129). Final definition captures Socrates too: Gulley (1968, 24–37) and Brown (2010, 161–163). Not a definition: Larsen (2007, 1).

33 Plato *Sophist*: dog and wolf, 231a; Theaetetus's trouble telling wild from tame, 222b5–7 (Larsen 2007, 11). Trevaskis (1955, 38) refuses to see a difficulty in the comparison.

34 Plato *Sophist*: angling as *zôiothêrikê* "live-animal hunting," 220a6, 7; sophist hunts for wage, 222d; sophistry hunt for the tame, 222a; sophist a beast, 226a; *thêra* "hunt," 235a9; sophist to be *lêpton* "grabbed," 226a8; seized, 241c.

35 Plato: philosopher a hunter, *Symposium* 223d; *Theaetetus* 143d (Taylor 2006: 159). The ambiguity of hunting reads as Plato's response to Xenophon, *On Hunting.* In the last of its 13 chapters (if that chapter indeed belongs in the work), *On Hunting* contrasts the sophist with the hunter, who unlike sophists brings civic benefits: 13.15–17. The chapter praises philosophers but finds no place for them with hunters: see 13.6, 13.9. Plato's *Sophist* seems to me to be answering Xenophon with the caution that hunting does not necessarily make the sophist wild or the philosopher tame.

feature of the first five definitions, as well as to why it should suddenly have become possible to seem to describe Socrates in the sixth. We do not have to set the first definitions aside as superficial or false, in other words, as long as we recognize one unintended effect they might have.

For a while the sophist's money keeps coming up. The sophist hunts for a wage; earns a wage; either wholesales or retails, or makes a profit, from debates among people. The sophist is an *emporos* "merchant, trafficker" who swaps learning for coin; belongs to the moneymaking class. Then the sixth definition looks at sophistical practices without reference to the money those practices bring in, and suddenly it has described the one Athenian interrogator known for not charging a fee. Genuinely poor or not, Socrates calls himself a *penês* "poor man, laborer." At his trial he can only offer to pay a small fine, because his money *ouk estin* "is not, doesn't exist." *He* would not have existed, from the point of view of the *Sophist*'s first definitions.[36]

How does the sixth definition read as an answer to the first five? It depends whether this definition arrives for the purpose of including Socrates among the sophists, or instead to offer an occasion for distinguishing them. On the former alternative, if the purpose is to reveal the sophistry in Socrates, money has to disappear in order to make room for penniless Socrates among the sophistical big bucks. Money does not genuinely define the sophist's behavior, is only among the trappings to be moved out of the way so as to make the sophistry itself visible.

Some commentators take the sophist's money that way, as strictly speaking extraneous to sophistry. Performing a task for a fee is not "internal to the activity itself."[37]

On the other hand *X*'s response to the likeness between philosopher and "noble sophist" emphasizes the need to make the sophist an outcast. The philosopher as analog to tamest animal belongs at home, while the wildest and most beastly, the sophist-wolf, needs to be cast out. These are familiar associations. Arcadia for one was the source of a report, whether myth or rite, about a young man's departure from the city for nine years during which he lived as a wolf. Wolves are animals that must be excluded from civilization.[38]

The need to call the sophist a wolf and cast him out, as one also needs to cast out the wolf-like tyrant, raises the possibility that the preceding

36 Plato *Sophist*: sophist hunts for wage, 222d; earns, 223b; wholesales, 224c–d; retails, 224d; profits, 225e; *emporos*, 224a; swaps learning, 224b; is moneymaking class, 226a. *X* mentions money as he approaches the final analysis, 233b, 234a; but it does not figure into the definition he produces. Socrates poor, *Apology* 36b–d; *Phaedrus* 227c; small fine and fiscal nonexistence, *Apology* 38b. On Socrates' not charging a fee and what that difference means see Blank (1985).

37 Taylor ( 2006, 160); see Larsen (2007, 3).

38 See Pausanias *Description of Greece* 8.2.6; rite in Pliny *Natural History* 8.81; some association with the story appears in Plato *Republic* 8.565d–e. See Buxton (2013, 43–44). For connections between these accounts of wolves and Plato, see Eidinow (2019).

definitions went wrong by assimilating the sophist to human society. And the money in those definitions shows *how* he'd been assimilated. By seeking, raising, earning, and swapping for money, the sophist takes his place within an economy that thrives within a city and connects one city to others.[39] To put the point literally: Wild animals have no use for money even as a joke. All this talk of the sophist's money domesticates sophistry, when the wish is to expose its wild nature preparatory to ejecting it from the city.

Today it might sound like common sense to distinguish between an activity and the pay one receives for performing it. The appearance of money rarely surprises, although even so some sources of revenue still invite worries: that mercenary fighting unlike military service reveals sociopathy in action; that prostitution is not just the sex of desire and affection with money added but new relations leached of affection even desire. That is today, after millennia of money. In antiquity currency was still a new arrival in the eastern Mediterranean. The Greeks would have perceived it as a cultural invention, if for no other reason, because of its absence from the Homeric epics. So sweeping the first definitions of sophistry aside on the grounds that money does not alter an activity might be anachronistic thinking.

Historians have recognized Plato's contribution to the Greek interpretation of money, although some discussions stay narrowly focused on whether he considered money good or bad, rather than on what he said about its way of working.[40] Vernant cites the *Sophist* as evidence that money was no symbol of causation for Plato, given that the sophist defined in that dialogue "remains on the level of nonbeing even as he is defined as a dealer engaged in commercial transactions." Against Vernant, Richard Seaford proposes a more ambivalent attitude in Plato, an attitude seen for instance when the *Laws*' chief speaker praises currency as great social benefit. "How could anyone *not* be a benefactor when he makes the substance of things [*ousia chrêmatôn*] comparable and commensurable when it had been uneven and incommensurable? This is what the power of money accomplishes." The *ousia* "substance, essence" but also "value, worth; estate, inheritance" become measurable when money exists, to everyone's advantage.[41]

Seaford does not pretend that the praise for currency in *Laws* exhausts the dialogues' assessments of money. Recall the *Republic*'s rule against its guardians' so much as touching gold and silver, or that critical stage in a city's decline when landholders liquidate their property and hold cash. More important: What the positive and negative appraisals of currency in Plato share is attention to its capacity to circulate and exchange for all things. Coinage is after all (Socrates says) a *sumbolon* "symbol" of exchange. The guardians must abstain from touching money because they are in their own

39 On sophistry as it participates in trade between cities, see Plato *Sophist* 224a–b.

40 Gernet (1981). For assessment and updates of such theories, see Seaford (2004); also Carson (1999, 45–72) on ancient attempts to comprehend the meaning of money.

41 Vernant (2006, 392); Seaford (2004, 259). Plato *Laws* 11.918b.

persons the gold and silver tokens that do not circulate – do not, as seen, farm or build but remain outside their city's economy. Money benefits (in the *Laws*) and harms (in the *Republic*) both times by virtue of its equalizing all values, therefore persons too.[42]

The Greeks identified Lydia as origin of coinage; and Herodotus, who credits Lydians with being first to use gold and silver currency, also calls them the first to practice *kapêleia* "retail sale," where that means the sale of products by those who did not make them. The retailer distributes goods without regard for their inherent value or knowledge of their nature, just moving them insofar as they'll sell for more than they cost. Already this result of currency's invention creates new networks in a culture, in the form of markets. The Greeks followed the Lydians in establishing marketplaces, and Herodotus says that the Persian king Cyrus accused them of routinely deceiving one another there. By contrast the Persians, reared to speak the truth, have no agora or market.[43]

Cyrus – and not only Cyrus – would find it disingenuous to identify a retailer's "activity in itself" apart from the money earned. On such an analysis, selling medications is just like bringing medication to a sick person, except for the fact that you don't care whether the medication works, that you sell the one on which you'll make the biggest profit, and that you try to convince customers that they'll need it regardless of whether they do. But otherwise, just like bringing medicine to the ill.

If the Greeks followed the Lydians' lead in minting coins and retailing, they refrained from prostituting their daughters as the Lydians did. Herodotus calls this the difference between the nations. Given the Lydians' precedence in the use of currency, this last development presents itself as further progress in monetization. Eventually one introduces even one's daughters to money: to the reality of the money they can be exchanged for. Greek utopias banned prostitution as if to turn back the tide; as far as the male parallel is concerned, and needless to say, the *Republic*'s troops who never touch money could not hire themselves out as either prostitutes or mercenaries.[44]

That pay denotes entry into a shared economy is undeniable in the case of Athenian civic duties. Pay for attendance in the assembly and for jury service, pay associated with the democratic faction, came under suspicion as

42 Plato *Republic*: against guardians' touching gold and silver, 3.416e–417a; liquidating property, 8.555c–d; coinage a symbol, 2.371b.

43 Herodotus *Histories*: Lydians first to coin gold and silver and practice retail, 1.94.1; Cyrus calls Greeks liars, 1.153.1; Persians truthtellers, 1.136.2; no Persian agora, 1.153.2. On *kapêleia* also, see Plato *Laws* 11.918a–b on its connection with currency; *Sophist* 224e on sophist–retailer.

44 Lydian daughters, Herodotus *Histories* 1.94.1 On prostitution in utopia see Pomeroy (1976, 117). Pomeroy cites Aristophanes *Ecclesiazusae* 716–719; Plato *Republic* 3.404d, against the proverbial "Corinthian maiden [*korên*]" as *philên* "girlfriend" for guardians.

the dissolution of citizens' bonds to the city.[45] The citizens were becoming hirelings, therefore ceasing to be true citizens.

Politically speaking, money's equalizing effect makes itself felt in the stories about tyrants who come from the regular population or return to it. Lydia home of coinage was also the home of tyranny, and the ring that (on Plato's version of the story) let Gyges ascend from shepherding to royal power can be seen to represent early money. Samos had its own famous tyrant, Polycrates, who created the *samaina* coin named after the warship stamped on it. Indeed one later source suggests that the swift *samaina* ships credited to Polycrates may have been *only* the valued coin. "Some say the *samaina* is a coin [*nomisma*]" – as if the fleet thought of as the strength of Samos began as a metaphorical reference to the coin.[46]

A signet ring figures in another story about Polycrates. His luck has been good and he fears the counterbalancing misfortune to come, so he flings his ring into the sea. Some days later a Samian fisherman catches a big beautiful fish and dutifully presents it to his king; the cooks prepare the fish for dinner and find the ring in its stomach. Now Polycrates knows he is doomed.[47] The story mythologizes the passage of currency around an economy: The coin you spend finally comes back to you. That such circulation implies the fall of a tyrant reinforces the sense that in an economy with freely circulating money the tyrant who seizes power can quickly lose it again.

Even the contrast between tame and wild canines can read mythologically as an interpretation of money. Palaephatus, the demythologizer, looks unbelieving at famous tales about dogs and horses: Diomedes, the Thracian giant, owned flesh-eating horses that turned on him; Actaeon's dogs tracked their master down and ate him. That kind of thing doesn't happen, Palaephatus says. It could not have happened back then because you never see it now. Diomedes owned a team of horses, that's all, and squandered his money caring for them; so people said the horses ate up his fortune – "devoured" the man: a metaphor – and later on this gossip was misunderstood. Likewise Actaeon loved breeding dogs. He blew his money on them, "wasted away," and folks said the dogs ate him alive (or words to that effect).[48]

Folk tales misconstrue financial metaphors into occult causes. Who knows whether the same thing happened with the Eleatics, to judge by the example that *X* gives. They told stories about *tokous* but *tokos* "child, infant" also

45 Jury pay begun by Pericles, Aristotle *Politics* 2.12 1274a8; "Aristotle" *Constitution of the Athenians* 27.3–5; assembly pay, "Aristotle" *Constitution of the Athenians* 41.3; Socrates against pay, Plato *Gorgias* 515e. On the corrupting effect of pay for jury duty, see Aristophanes *Wasps, passim.*

46 Suda *Samiôn ho dêmos* (Adler number sigma 77); discussion in Ure (1922, 74–75).

47 Herodotus *Histories* 3.40–42.

48 Palaephatus *Peri Apistôn*: Diomedes, Chapter 7; Actaeon, Chapter 6. The Thracian Diomedes in this story is apparently unrelated to the *Iliad*'s character, although that name tends to be associated with horses.

means interest on a loan. The Eleatic tale that the *xenos* complained about concerning beings and their babies might have begun – far from ontology – as advice about a sound investment.[49]

In Palaephatus's examples anyway myth turns domestic money lost into domesticated animals gone wild. When *X* moves to the sixth definition he mythologizes despite himself, intending to talk about sophistry apart from its moneymaking and only ending up talking about wolves. The money he removed from his definition of the sophist return as the sophist's lupine wildness.

## What is not philosophy; or, what-is-not philosophy

The point about casting out sophists does not depend on mythology or the interpretation of myth. Dialectical division will suffice to set sophistical business apart from an older and superior type of exchange, just as the *Republic*'s poets (who share in sophistry's mimetic practice) are sent away from the well-run city,[50] and as nonbeing is rigorously distinguished from being.

To begin with *X* separates commerce from gift-giving. The acquisition of property that occurs without hunting takes place either through the *agorastikon* "commercial activity, buying and selling," under which the sophist is subsumed, or through gift-giving, but not both.[51]

Gift-giving characterizes *xenia*. The episode from Homer that *X*'s closing tag harks back to, the conversation in which Diomedes and Glaucos discover themselves to be *xenoi*, ends with their exchanging armor. Glaucos's gold armor is worth much more than Diomedes's, but then unbalanced exchanges will occur in relationships innocent of money. A *xenos*-relation is reciprocal, but reciprocity does not have to consist in equal gifts. Glaucos's grandfather Bellerophon had given the grandfather of Diomedes a golden cup, while Oeneus grandfather of Diomedes gave Bellerophon a leather belt.[52] If anything the amusement in the *Iliad*'s narrator's voice at the discrepancy between their gifts indicates the time elapsed between the Trojan War and the composition of the *Iliad*, and the sense by the later date that *xenos*-relations lent themselves to unreasonable swaps.

This dialogue fittingly calls its principal philosopher *xenos*. *X* is a *xenos* to Socrates, Theodorus, and the rest, and given the reciprocity of the relationship each of them is a *xenos* to him in turn.[53] Together this group chases the

49 For double meaning of *tokos* see Plato *Republic* 6.507a, 8.555e; Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazusae* 845. At *Statesman* 267a1–2 young Socrates will thank *X* for explaining one analysis as if paying *tokos* on a debt.

50 Plato *Republic* 3.398a.

51 Plato *Sophist* 223c.

52 Homer *Iliad* 6.219–220. For a modern discussion of reciprocity, see Becker (1986).

53 When the sequel dialogue Plato's *Statesman* begins, Socrates is speaking of his debt to Theodorus for the *charis* "gift" of bringing *X* into their conversation. Their exchange makes explicit that the debt can't be quantified – as we would expect from *xenos*-relations. Plato *Statesman* 257a–b.

sophist into the thickets of nonbeing. Where the *Sophist*'s initial definitions had inserted him into the economy, the final analysis leaves him *heteros* "other to, different from" being, at the margins of existence.

If the result for philosophers is gratifying it is also paradoxical. The philosophers' *xenos*-relation excludes the sophist, so that philosophers belong on the inside; but this means that the true philosopher, exceptional as human being and unmercenary when everyone else is rushing to buy and sell, nevertheless stands in the heart of a society from which the sophist has been banished. Somehow the philosopher is being figured as both exceptional and insider.

So it is remarkable that whenever Plato depicts Socrates in conversation with a famous sophist visiting Athens, he constructs a reversal that moves Socrates to the inside despite his remaining the anomalous personage. Plato's *Gorgias, Hippias Major,* and *Protagoras* all stage meetings between Socrates and the sophists they are named for. In the *Gorgias* Socrates is threatened with prosecution and unavenged violence, and he responds describing an afterlife in which he represents the establishment while his accuser is slapped around with impunity.[54]

Socrates does something really peculiar in the *Hippias Major*. He presses Hippias with recognizably Socratic challenges, but attributes his points to an unidentified acquaintance whom readers identify as Socrates. He delivers the challenges as if in league with that outside voice, the philosophers banding together.[55]

Finally and most literally there is the confrontation in Plato's *Protagoras.* Socrates comes to a gathering of sophists – Protagoras their leader – but threatens to exclude himself from the group if Protagoras does not philosophize in the short questions and answers Socrates is used to. Alcibiades,

54 Plato *Gorgias*: danger of Socrates' being struck, 486a–c; same danger to Callicles in afterlife, 527a. On the association between Socrates and the afterlife he tells of, see Sedley (2009, 58). I am persuaded by Sedley's argument that what Socrates says in the afterlife myth about the respective judiciary systems of Zeus and Cronus parallels and represents the difference between moral deliberation as Socratic philosophy knows such a thing and the deliberation that took place in Athenian courtrooms. Thus (in the terms I am using here) the myth works to shuttle the outcast Socrates into the center of a new society. Sedley's comments about ambivalence toward politics in the *Gorgias* are very relevant here.

55 Plato *Hippias Major*: first reference to unnamed man, 286c–d; Socrates *mimoumenos* "imitating, representing" him, 287a1–2; *ekeinos genomenos* "becoming that man" to question Hippias, 287b4–5. Late in the dialogue Plato removes all doubt: Socrates describes that phantom quarreler as the son of Sophroniscus, 298b. The reader knows that Sophroniscus was Socrates' father, so that Socrates has constructed his own philosophical society; Hippias who seems not to recognize the allusion is excluded from the joke and hence from the philosophical companionship. Socrates does present himself as being at odds with the quarreler, but that presentation serves the same purpose. Hippias misunderstands the nature of agreement and disagreement, deluding himself that he and Socrates are joining forces against another Athenian when in fact Hippias is the one excluded and the butt of Socrates' joke.

symbol of Athenian power, intervenes to broker a compromise that requires Protagoras to answer Socrates' questions.[56]

Compared to the philosophical midwife born to be the freak or a failure in nature's continuum, this wish for the philosopher however paradoxical does at least narrow down the fine human's nature. Not any exception will do; this exception also needs to occupy the community from which the sophist departs.

The trouble comes in the movement to ensure the departure. Concerned to exclude the sophist who for all his faults is imbedded in Athenian social economy, is even faulted for being imbedded, *X* analyzes the nonbeing that sophists feel at home in into something coherent. Even father Parmenides erred in taking nonbeing to be meaningless. *X* analyzes the *prima facie* impossibility "what is not," words that seem to say nothing, into *ousia* "being, existence" and the *heteron* "other, different," and what *metechei* "shares" in both.[57]

The exclusion rests on the difference. The time for vague stories is over and this precise element of the definition puts the sophist *somewhere else.* Even so, if myths carry on speaking of money in new ways, this definition rigorous as it is continues to suggest old financial events. The word *ousia* invokes monetary assets. Familiar in Aristotle as the word translated "substance," *ousia* appears frequently in the Platonic dialogues too, as notably here in the *Sophist*, where it means something close to "existence."[58] But in classical Greek substance could also mean monetary substance: estate; property (as someone rich in the United States may be called a person of substance).[59]

A stern critic of myth might say "*Here's* the story." The Eleatics spun yarns about beings because something down-to-earth had happened and then got misunderstood. Someone shared an estate with "someone else [*heteron*: an other]," but as time passed people misunderstood the metaphor.

The verb *metechein* is hard to understand any other way. Sharing is a thing you do with money. Not coincidentally this is the word over which Aristotle will take Platonic metaphysics to task. Poetical verb that it is, "sharing" can't explain the Forms as Plato expects it to.[60]

56 Plato *Protagoras* 336b–d.

57 Plato *Sophist*: apparent impossibility, 240d–241b; shares in *ousia* and *heteron*, 258b–c, 259a.

58 Plato *Sophist*: *ousia* as contrast with nonbeing, 260d3–4, 262c1–3; motion and rest sharing in *ousia*, 250b, 251e–252a; also 219b4, 239b, 245d4–5, 246b–c, 248a–d, 251d5, 258b2, 261e. Theaetetus contrasts *ousia* with "not being" at Plato *Theaetetus* 185c9.

59 Herodotus *Histories*: Croesus confiscated an estate, 1.92.2, 1.92.4; "half my worth," 6.86a.5; wealth of Pythias, 7.28.1. In drama, see Euripides *Heracles* 337 (others now possess the *ousia* of Heracles), *Helen* 1253; Aristophanes *Ecclesiazusae* 729 (an inventory of one's belongings). Among orators see Andocides *On the Mysteries* describing an estate to be inherited (Andocides 1.118); Lysias 18.17 on the confiscation of property. Wealth is *ousia* in Plato *Republic* 8.551b, regarding the requirement in oligarchy that no one *archôn metechein* "share in leadership" without *ousia*. See *Laws* 11.918b, discussed above, on currency making *ousia* measurable.

60 Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1.9 991a21–23.

This much might be only free-association on metaphors in Plato, except for one sign from the dialogue. Socrates originally almost showily introduced "sharing" into the *Sophist*, when he met the *xenos* and quoted Homer on Odysseus in the Cyclops' cave. But he didn't quote Homer exactly; he added the same verb "to share" to the otherwise intact Homeric phrase. Human beings gain benefits from the gods when they *share* in shame or reverence. In other words, Socrates made a point of connecting the *xenos*-relation with sharing, even falsifying Homer's authority to support the connection.

Has the sophist become a *xenos* to the philosopher, as *X*'s reference from Homer also suggested when it set philosopher and sophist before each other like Glaucos and Diomedes? So they are strangers to one another and opposed; but also allies and participants in mutual exchange. The nonbeing attributed to the sophist is rendered coherent through an analysis that suggests that the sophist shares the philosopher's money.

Vernant had it backwards. Rather than discolor money with the nonbeing of the sophist, *X*'s analysis grants the sophist a share of whatever the philosopher is good for. And so if the philosopher now admits of a more specific description, the same description might also fit the sophist.

Even aside from puzzles over elusive Greek verbs, the ground-level uncertainty about the sophist is present and active. The sophists have entered the culture: opened schools, sold lessons, earned money they use for buying food and clothing. The philosopher needs to stand as the exception to this human norm but also craves the position of the norm and human standard.[61] When the argument begins by painting the sophist as normalized everywhere yet craves his exclusion, can we attribute any stable contrasting place for the sophist's antipode?

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# 9 The *Statesman*

## The little difference that makes philosophy

The philosophizing that led to the sophist continues.[1] It's later the same day. Having heard the indictment read out Socrates will soon be standing trial, but before taking on that business he'd like to press on toward the *politikos* "statesman, political official, politician" and consequently reach their great object of desire and superlative human the philosopher.[2]

However primed to carry on and reach the philosopher, the *Statesman* attends to the varieties of governance and vagarious politics until it seems to have forgotten where the conversation goes next. The *xenos* from Elea enlists Theaetetus's friend "the young Socrates" to join him in finding out what makes politics work; but the dialogue never sights and scarcely mentions the philosopher. It finishes with young Socrates only thanking *X* for the "superb" way he wrapped up their search for what is royal and political. The omission feels deliberate even perverse. No one hints or signals that a definitory task remains ahead, let alone how they'll take it on. The nonappearance of the *Philosopher*, the dialogue Plato failed to write, is anticipated by the philosopher's disappearance from the dialogue he did write.[3]

What follows, if anything does, about that exceptional person the philosopher? For one thing the difference between politician and philosopher has

1 This chapter began as a paper, "A Little Move toward Greek Philosophy." I am grateful to John Sallis for including it in a workshop on Plato's *Statesman* in fall 2014; and to Jay Bernstein and the Philosophy Department at the New School, where I read it in fall 2015. I received helpful responses on both occasions and from the paper's readers. Special thanks to Cinzia Arruzza, Andreas Avgousti, Darren Gardner, and Michael Naas. A version of that paper appeared in Sallis's anthology on the *Statesman* as Pappas (2017). The present chapter takes over some passages from that paper but is mostly new, and disagrees at several points with that paper.

2 In agreement with most Plato scholarship this chapter will call the *politikos* "statesman," sometimes "political official." But the abundantly significant Greek word can mean anything from "civil servant" to "civilian."

3 Plato *Statesman*: opening restatement of plan regarding sophist and others, 257a; philosopher incomparably greater, 257b; philosopher at 257b, "philosophy" again, 272c; "superb," 311c. This character the *xenos* is freer with the word in Plato's *Sophist*. He speaks of philosophizing, philosopher, and philosophy at 249c, 253c, 253e (twice), 254a, 260a. Those are six mentions to this dialogue's one, and typically refer to the enterprise of defining the figure.

become harder to discern. Socrates may still insist on the great gulf between them but *X* is under no obligation to agree. We recall that Socrates on trial looking back over his annoying interrogations of Athenians begins with a respected public figure. "I don't have to say his name. One of the *politikoi*."[4] *X* doesn't vilify the political type or suggest, as that part of the *Apology* does, the type's resemblance to sophists. On the contrary: *X* proposes a sequence of unflattering categories they will find the sophist hiding in, as fits a character known for cleverness and quickness on feet. Huckster? Trickster? It's always something like that. But where sophists were made antiphilosophical almost by force of will, the political leader is idealized. You can define sophists in terms of what they actually do, but the *politikoi* invite definitions that reflect what they intend to do.

For example *X* and young Socrates begin their inquiry premising that statesman, king, master (of slaves), and household head are "one." Their spheres of operation differ, but a philosopher knows to look away from practices of domination or institutional structures to find the expertise that defines all governance. And much later, nearing the dialogue's conclusion, *X* takes the subject beyond knowledgeable command to knowledge without command. The political profession does not rule but tells others how to rule. Politics is losing its practicality; indeed when *X* sets all constitutional forms below the single example of government informed by political *technê*, politicking appears to have shed anything in it that you'd call political.[5]

The pressure that this dialogue places on the philosophical act of defining, or perhaps we should say the pressure created by the definitional practice, threatens to turn political engagement into theory. If theory, why not philosophy?

On the other hand *X* would have pointed out this result of their investigation, even if he did disagree with the way Socrates set philosophers far from sophists and statesmen. As a matter of fact a disagreement so central to their inquiry should have made him announce the difference all the more clearly. Philosophy moves beyond Socrates. For that matter, the bright young man also named Socrates would have spotted the point and thanked his tutor for revealing not just the statesman but the philosopher too.

## Philosophy and the great myth

In more than one way the *Statesman* pivots around the long, extraordinary, self-conscious cosmic myth that *X* tells. And besides the story's other effects on this dialogue's argument, it provides the only direct evidence of how the *xenos* understands philosophy.

4 Plato *Apology* 21c.

5 Plato *Statesman*: king, etc., all one, 258e–259d; the *technê* doesn't rule, 305c–e; constitutions merely imitate the one good form of rule, 301a–b.

This same teacher who objected in the *Sophist* to philosophers' mythologizing ontology, as if their students were children, now makes a project of constructing a myth for young Socrates, who has not gone far beyond childhood. This myth comes before them as if by transcendental argument, as the fundamental world process that accounts for several popular stories: stories of a reversal in the sun's motion, of the past golden age of Cronus, of human beings' birth from earth. The "cause" of these myths, not previously told, will reveal the nature of statesmanship. And so *X* discloses cosmic cycles in which the universe spins one direction under the hand of its creator, then the other way when that great god lets go of it, and again in the previous direction when the god once more grabs hold.[6] This "biggest and fullest" of all turns that ever occur marks the change between the present age and an era (both far back and far ahead) whose natural laws themselves are backward. People went naked and ate food as it presented itself to them. So freed were they from any effort that they didn't even have to breed, for everyone was born rising from earthly graves and grew young back into infancy. All animals belonged to herds, so that technically nothing was wild, and nothing ate anything else. In a world of such different natural principles, as *X* adds gratuitously, people talked to animals.[7]

Among its other kinds of innocence, that other life could be called innocent of politics. A god tended humans in the way that a *nomeus* "herdsman" tends animals, the different and more divine creature watching over the lower. With the god herding there were no *politeiai*. This word *politeia* means political order understood generally, but also (as is explicit in Aristotle) a particular type of constitution the republic or "free commonwealth."

The Greek title of Plato's *Republic* is of course *politeia*; often very broadly the word refers to how people govern themselves. Even if herd animals could speak today it would be absurd to picture them talking politics, unless as the characters in *Animal Farm* do they intended to end their herded condition. Talking ants and bees might reveal no more in political conversation than their conformity and acceptance of the existing order, but that acceptance still has meaning as a political act. (Nietzsche's descriptions of modern humanity as herd animals implies the species to have become apolitical in a less innocent sense, as a type now characterized by adherence to values not its own.)

6 Christopher Rowe reads the changes in orbital motion more elaborately than the usual reading of them as alternation between the present movement in one direction and the movement in a mythical era the other way. For Rowe, the world spins east to west both in the present era and in the one governed by a god, only spinning the other way in the brief period of transition between those two (Rowe 1999, 28n31). I admire the clarity and completeness of Rowe's thinking although I am not yet convinced. In any case, the substantive claims I am making about this myth stand or fall whether one accepts or rejects Rowe's reading.

7 Plato: *X* objecting to mythologizing, *Sophist* 242c–d; see Chapter 8. *Statesman*: young Socrates near childhood, 268e; popular stories, 268e–269b; *aition* "cause" of those myths, 269c1; cycles, 269c–272b; *megistên kai teleôtatên tropên* "biggest and fullest turn," 270c1–2; people naked and fed, 272a; earth-birth, 270d–e; nothing wild, 271e; animal talk, 272c.

The *Statesman* reiterates the word *nomeus*, from the verb *nemô* "to herd," almost always in connection with the statesman and the being, clearly not a statesman, who provides in that old divinely supervised time a care impossible for humans nowadays.[8]

The Eleatic *xenos* raises a question about human life in that other era, but young Socrates has no idea how to answer it and *X* himself after introducing the topic seems in a hurry to drop it. Do we judge that age of Cronus *eudaimonesteron* "happier" than the present? *If* those people free from labor used their time to philosophize, and if they took advantage of their mutual comprehensibility with animals to deliberate and grow sagacious, then their happiness hugely exceeded our own. If they ate and drank and chatted idly, "telling stories like the ones told today about them," the opposite would be the case. *X* leaves the question as if undecidable and continues; only now has he mentioned the word *philosophia* "philosophy."[9]

*X* is implying that people did *not* philosophize back then. The happy first humans in the Cronus age in *Works and Days*, to whom he must be alluding with his remark about old stories, lived joyfully (according to Hesiod) but eating rather than deliberating. More incidentally even trivially one might observe that the people in that other life grow younger as they live; and we can't expect philosophy from those who never age. (One might also ask why *X* will use weaving to illustrate how philosophy works when the people in that other time dispense with clothing and the trouble of making it. Is he looking back at those naked people with a symbol in mind of the present?) Reflections in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* on connections between sex and philosophy would also tell against philosophical activity by these sexless creatures.[10]

Philosophy belongs in the present age, as difficult as life in this age can get. But even the fact that *X* entertains the question "Did they philosophize?" and regardless of how you answer, the question shows the difference between statesman and philosopher. A *politikos* who governs fellow human beings cannot exist in the age of Cronus by hypothesis.

8 Divine *nomeus* and no *politeiai*, Plato *Statesman* 271e. On *politeia* in the specific sense, Aristotle *Politics* 4.9 1294a30–b39. Nietzsche and "Heerde" or herds, for example, *Beyond Good and Evil* §191, also §44; see Taureck (2008). The word *nomeus* in Plato *Statesman*: what kind of *nomeus* is the statesman, 267e, 268c; *nomeus* of humans in age of Cronus, 271d; a *nomeus* assigned to humans, 275c; we shouldn't have called the statesman *nomeus*, 275d; divine *nomeus* distinguished from human, 276d; and see 268b.

9 Plato *Statesman* 272b–c.

10 Age of Cronus, Hesiod *Works and Days* 109–119; first humans *terpont'en thaliêsi* "delighting in festivities," 115; earth fed them plentifully, 117–118. Weaving, Plato *Statesman* 279b–280a. Plato's response to Hesiod, see El Murr (2010). On the presumption that those in the time of Cronus did not philosophize see El Murr (2010, 292–293); on contested issues in reading this myth, see El Murr (2010, 277–278). For a different interpretation according to which the care of Cronus is the ideal, see Brisson (2000) and Rowe (2010). I will avoid engaging in this larger debate because Rowe's remarkable interpretation holds to the temporal visualization of the myth that I will question. Philosophizing less as one grows younger, see Rowe (2010, 304).

## Politics and the cosmic myth

From another perspective as well, the myth distinguishes philosophers from political officials even of the idealized stripe. Despite its extravagance the myth has an unfabulous function, separating mythic realms and divine aid generally from the domain in which politics has to work; and in exercising that function the myth tells against a commingling of the philosophical with the political.

The stories that *X* starts with, the ones young Socrates has heard, cover a variety of events: biological, astronomical, and (with the age of Cronus) political or ethical. That such a range of stories all comes to be accounted for through one magnificent story, with the tales all harking back to that contrary spin of the universe, suggests that everything you have heard as mythic and marvelous likewise percolated down from that domain. The people who lived nearest to the herded life remembered some of those events and passed them on, and people like young Socrates and *X* have heard the half-remembered scraps. *X* understands that myths live out their significance amid ethical observances and ritual practice, and more largely convey a sense of the world's enchantment. The superstitious man in the sketch by Theophrastus shouts Athena's name when he hears owls, because he takes himself to live among gods. The cosmic-cycle story brings the news that the enchantment is gone. It vanished when the god let go of the universe and won't be back for any future that a reasonable person can expect to see.

The spirit of this myth matches the spirit of the demythologizing explanations later given by Palaephatus, and in a sense the general strategy is the same. As Palaephatus posits a man so obsessed with breeding horses that the pastime ate up his fortune, and later generations misheard that metaphor as nonsense about flesh-eating horses, *X* is now saying: Remarkable occurrences were reported in a very different world, and then disseminated by people who misheard them as nonsense about autochthonous births in this world.[11]

The *Statesman* not only follows the general method of division as demonstrated and executed in the *Sophist* (and contributes new rules and tips to the method), but also corrects its own definitions as the *Sophist* did, by starting with a new collection within which to divide. The *Sophist* kept starting with moneymaking practices before *X* took their inquiry in the difficult new direction that analyzed nonbeing. And in the *Statesman* the misguided search for its title figure among herders yielded to a new approach when the myth showed what divine herders are like.[12]

11 Plato *Statesman*: stories remembered separately from one another, 269b. Theophrastus *Superstitiousness* (*Characters* 16): owls, 8; fear of *to daimonion*, 1. On Palaephatus see Chapter 8 and the parallels between his arguments and the disappearance of money from analyses of sophistry.

12 See *X*'s explanation of the error in their first approach, and how the myth corrected it, Plato *Statesman* 275b–c.

If the life imagined as another era resembles political utopia, the story of the universe's changes in direction has relegated utopia to the land of fairy tales. For this reason commentators often understand the myth as Plato's self-criticism. He looks back at the *Republic* with its monumental ambitions for politics and reassigns its proposals to another world. *This* world calls for more restrained hopes.

The myth asks for some interpretation along these lines, or along some lines besides merely the adjustment of initial collections. After all the *xenos* himself calls the myth great, wondrous, a mass, and too long, as if advising readers to look elsewhere for its real function. As Christopher Gill says, modern commentators seek "an unstated purpose" in the myth besides its adjustment of a definition.[13] Platonic self-criticism, on a scale that aims the entire pursuit of political justice in a new direction, would call for reconceptualization of the world.[14]

The bucolic simplicity in the myth's age of Cronus brings the *Republic*'s first city to mind. As Socrates initially describes that city, it sounds normal enough, if simplified. Then Socrates spells out the lives people will lead in such a place. They eat simple vegetables, dress only as the weather demands, and sleep on leaves. Glaucon wants more, and the *Republic* abandons this "city of pigs" despite Socrates' trust that it is the healthy society. In that subsequent development the *Republic* apparently abandons utopia.[15]

In the plainness of wardrobe, in their life with barely any furniture, and in their vegetarian diet, the occupants of the first city almost find themselves in the age of Cronus. The *Statesman* might even be additionally alluding to the city of pigs when its effort to define the herder of humans verges on describing a swineherd. And if the occupants of such simple country settlements do not in fact philosophize, we understand why Adeimantus can't guess where in the city of pigs its justice would appear. That city fails to spot its own justice and also fails to display it; it fails to see itself, as the people long ago also failed to do when they whiled their lives away feasting.[16]

Going beyond such utopias does not make the *Statesman*'s myth a self-criticism. The *Republic* already went beyond that city. And the arguments, compelling ones, that understand the *Statesman* as a rebuke to the *Republic*

13 Plato *Statesman* 277a–c. Looking for "unstated purpose," Gill (1979, 154).

14 Debates over how to read Plato developmentally, and how to organize the chronology of his dialogues, have flowered in the past few decades and the controversy could immediately derail this discussion. See the opening pages of Chapter 1 on this question. I will ask about Platonic self-criticism without inferring that Plato overhauled his political thought. The minimal claim to consider is that the *Statesman* myth criticizes the *Republic*. For that one needs no assertions about development; about chronology only that the *Republic* precedes the *Statesman*, which is a mild and reasonable claim.

15 Plato *Republic* Book 2: initial description of city, 369b–371e; simple life, 372a–d; Glaucon wants more, 372d; Socrates calls it healthy, 372e. On the abandonment of the first city, see Chapter 3.

16 Plato: human and pig, *Statesman* 266c, d; justice in first city, *Republic* 2.372a1–4.

as a whole, aim at more than a reply to the city of pigs. (Though to be sure it wouldn't hurt to call the city of pigs to mind in this connection; the memory focuses the reader's mind on the *Republic*.) On a recent reading in this direction by Charles Kahn, the *Statesman* myth argues against a political system that elevates its rulers above other citizens as if the two belonged to different species. Writing a little earlier, Malcolm Schofield emphasizes the type of expertise and judgment in the statesman, something closer to Aristotelian practical wisdom than to the theoretical understanding possessed by the *Republic*'s philosopher–rulers.[17]

Finally the eugenicist proposals in the two dialogues make a contrast that again implies that the *Statesman* distinguishes its eponymous character from the *Republic*'s ruler. Courage as it appears in people can conflict with *sôphrosunê* "moderation," the brave and aggressive type at odds with the watchful and restrained. The good ruler will instruct citizens in right opinion, and also supervise marriages to prevent excessively courageous people from always breeding with others of their kind, ultramoderates with one another. The *Republic*'s fair city had pursued the opposite practice, breeding brave with brave to intensify soldierly virtues – a good plan for a city divided into castes, not for one that seeks to distribute the right mix of characters. The *Republic*'s wedding lottery and bureaucracy of breeding select and amplify human differences, in a way that leaves its populace herded by their governors.[18]

As important as the question is of the dialogues' order and Plato's changes in belief, for the purposes of portraying the *Statesman*'s philosopher such passages have one most important effect. Without ever giving up the demand for a political leader's excellence, *X* is returning that leader to the populace from which the *Republic*'s leader had been removed. The philosopher remains at a remove, therefore someone distinct from the statesman.

## The philosopher's herding

Not a happy indolent in the grand myth's age of Cronus, but also not a politico at work in the age we occupy, the philosopher so far is still hard to identify.

17 Kahn (2009, 161–162). The view of Plato's political development, from the *Republic*'s utopia through *Statesman* to lower-down-to-earth *Laws*, already appears in Owen (1953, 89–94). On Owen's reading, Schofield (1997, 224). On the statesman's expertise, Schofield (1997, 224–225). Plato *Statesman* 284e on political measurement and judgment unlike the reasoning attributed by the *Republic* to its rulers. Gill too distinguishes between the knowledge that the *Republic*'s rulers possess and statesman-like skill. Rulers in the *Statesman* are characterized by benefits they bring the city rather than by knowledge they have; when they do possess knowledge it concerns particulars not a philosopher's generalities (Gill 1979, 152).

18 Plato *Republic* Book 5: rulers arranging marriages, 458e–461c; breed best with best, 459d; keep *genos* "class" of guardians *katharon* "clean, pure," 460c. Plato *Statesman*: marriages, 310b–311b; courage at odds with *sôphrosunê*, 306b, 307e–308b; the courageous and the restrained two *genê* set against each other, 308b; opposed virtues mediated by true opinion, 309c–e; marriages to resist breeding of like with like, 310c–d; mixed character of ruler, 311a.

We do seem to be tracking down a "Platonic exceptional," as this book means that phrase, because the *Statesman* does not spirit philosophers off to another world but keeps them among such depressingly regular occurrences as rhapsode and sophist.

The myth of the universe's cycles may have more to say about the philosopher's place besides its hint that the golden age lacked philosophy. I already called the myth self-conscious; by this I mean that it comes in as a myth about myths and consequential to belief in myths, but also that Plato has his *xenos* display the makings of the myth. The story is put together out of fragments, like the tale of the sun's reversed direction, and *X* spells out those elements as if inviting Plato's reader to take the operation further and see what else goes into the story.

Kahn responds to the invitation elaborating the Platonic and Empedoclean cosmologies that inform the myth.[19] There is more to be said. In the story the dead rise again and rejuvenate, and that does not happen in any of the precursors cited by Kahn or already pointed out inside the dialogue. In fact it has an unfamiliar sound to it, where Greek sources are concerned. But Theopompus, a younger contemporary of Plato's, says that Persian philosophers taught exactly such a thing. Diogenes Laertius reports what Theopompus had written, that "according to the Magi humans will come to life again and will be immortal, and things that are now will endure with the names they have."[20]

According to the Persian Magi the things that exist now will continue to do so in a time to come, even to the point of being known in that future time by the names they possess at present. The world will be as it had been and all human beings will come back to life within it, returning to a universe they recognize, just as *X* says about the great past and future ages of Cronus.

Besides resuscitation, the persistence of language also unites the myth with the Magi. *X* says that when humanity arrived at its present era, people (having just passed through the crisis of reversal) imitated their former condition – at

19 Kahn (2009, 150–152).

20 Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 1.9: *anabiôsesthai kata tous Magous phêsi tous anthrôpous kai athanatous esesthai, kai ta onta tais autôn epiklêsesi diamenein.* The phrase *tais autôn epiklêsesi* "with the names they have" sometimes invites emendation. Modern editions of Theopompus, such as Jacobi's *FGrH*, replace the problematic *epiklêsesi* with *epi perikuklêsesi* "cycles, revolutions," rendering the cosmological sense unambiguous. "Things that are now will endure through the cycles of the world." But it is a wonder that a meaning as straightforward as that would ever have disappeared in a word replacement so erroneous as to turn a literal claim into something mysterious. I retain the words as given by Diogenes. The word *epiklêsesi* might refer to calling upon someone, hence in a religious context "invocations," the acts of calling upon the gods. "Things that are now will endure because of their [the Magis'] invocations." Because this is a contrived rendition of the sentence, and adds a priestly activity to the Magi who were just being described as theorists of the world, I find the most straightforward translation to be best, taking *epiklêsesi* in its most common sense of "name." Things will have the names they have.

first closely, then with decreasing accuracy as they remembered less. Stories like the one in Hesiod about a golden age reflect the garbled and partial old memories. The words those survivors carry across the border from Cronus-world must remain the same, or almost the same, if those people are telling their same old stories.

In one of the methodological asides that confirms his status as teacher, the Eleatic alerts young Socrates to homonyms. A philosopher knows not to conclude from sameness of words that the objects named by those words are the same too; in one instance democracies; but then a good teacher will cannily insist on a point in one context that also applies to another, giving a student the exercise of putting advice from one place together with new examples. The imitation between eras implies sameness of words in different cosmic eras.[21]

So suppose you ask: Who in our time imitates the herder? Understanding the political message of the myth means recognizing the difference between good governance and god's governance. The god who herds plays many parts with the herd animals that a political leader has nothing to do with. For example, as *X* observes, those who herd animals not only command them but serve as doctors, matchmakers, and midwives. Given that – in the dramatic time of the dialogues – Socrates was calling himself a midwife only the day before, this word may have been inserted to signal that where a statesman fails to do what herders once did, philosophers could succeed. The philosopher does not practice literal midwifery, as Socrates explained in the *Theaetetus*; so you might call what the philosopher does today "midwifery" as if the word carried over with some changes in meaning from the other age in which the herder did supervise births.[22]

*X* explains what the philosopher does do. After all even their inquiry into statesmanship exists in order to make its participants more dialectical about everything, that is, better at defining things. Philosophers practice division. They distinguish subgroups within larger groups. The *xenos* calls this drawing of distinctions by the name *diairesis* and the root verb *diaireô* "divide"; the verbs *dichazô* and *diastellô* describe the same procedure.

In one difficult explication of an essential but elusive rule for divisions he also uses the verb *dianemô.* A philosopher divides a kind into species not merely parts (or as we might say not merely into subsets). Every species–division creates parts but not all parts are species, *X* says, drawing distinctions even when explaining how to draw distinctions, in other words modeling what he teaches in the manner of a good teacher. Young Socrates proposed breaking up all herding into care of humans and care of beasts, and *X* wants to rule out such lopsided distinctions.[23]

21 Plato *Statesman*: memories of golden age, 273a–b; philosophical indifference to names, 261d; ambiguous name for democracies, 302d.

22 Plato: herder practices *maieutikê* "midwifery," *Statesman* 268b1; philosopher's midwifery not literal, *Theaetetus* 150b–d.

23 Plato *Statesman*: inquiry as practice, 285d1–2; *diairesis*, *passim*; *dichazô*, 264d; *diastellô*, 265e; divide into species not parts, 262b; *eidos* "species" is *meros* "part" but not vice versa, 263b;

*X*'s lesson to young Socrates makes trouble in the first place because it tells against division as a method. A well-intentioned philosopher might divide animals into human and nonhuman instead of carrying out the longer divisions by which *X* arrives at the same difference. The Platonic metaphor of chopping at the joints hardly helps in guiding the divisions. What is worse, *X* explains himself with a segue to the distinction between Greeks and barbarians. The faulty distinction young Socrates drew resembles "the way that the many around here distinguish [*dianemousí*] humans" into Greek and other. One only sets "Lydians and Phrygians" apart from Greeks when no alternative natural-kind terms exist with which to subdivide the human species.[24]

As explanation the analogy seeks to illuminate the questionable by appeal to the hotly contested. But in the process it introduces this additional verb for distinguishing or dividing, *dianemô.* The word comes up twice more to mean "divide"; and this telltale name for what philosophers do also means (in a political sense) "distribute" and more broadly "govern." It clearly means "govern" twice in the *Statesman*, nearly balancing the meaning "distinguish," while its root verb *nemô* and words containing it run through both the myth and the nonmythic argumentation.[25]

In its doubleness, *dianemô* follows the Homeric *diakrinô* "separate, distinguish," which names an activity common to king and shepherd.[26] These verbs describe both the governing act that keeps a herd or flock cleaving together, and the discerning act that cleaves one part of the flock from another.

The Platonic corpus gives the impression of being charmed by valences of meaning in *nomos* words. Phrases in the *Laws* and the *Minos* bring together *nomimos* "law-abiding," *nomeus* "herdsman," *nomos* "law," and other words containing that subtle root, perhaps drawing their readers' attention to links that had gone unnoticed by Plato's time. The *Minos* passage plays with these words and then combines them in a punning phrase repeated twice, *ho agathos nomothetês te kai nomeus dianemôn* "the good lawgiver and herdsman distributes."[27]

young Socrates divided herding, 261e. On the remark that the inquiry exists for the sake of making its participants dialectical, see Castoriadis (2002, 19, 25, 88).

24 Plato *Statesman*: chopping at joints, 287c; Greek versus non-Greek, 262c–d; Lydians and Phrygians, 262e–263a. Against the response that Plato inserts his example out of some cosmopolitan sentiment, see Rowe (1995, 16); Márquez (2005, 148–150).

25 Plato *Statesman*: *dianemô* "divide, distinguish," 266a, 266e; *dianemô* "govern," 297b, 301d. As far as I know only Castoriadis has seen this connection in the *Statesman*, observing that *nemô* is the myth's verb for herding and that the verb also refers to dividing or distinguishing; it makes for a Platonic "association" between the two activities (Castoriadis 2002, 22). But *nemô* hardly appears in connection with the philosopher's work. It is the verb formed from it, *dianemô*, that informs the myth's effects.

26 The similar ambiguity in Homer and *diakrinô*, Gutzwiller (1991, 24).

27 Plato: phrases bringing together *nomimos* etc., *Laws* 4.714a; *Minos* 321b; *ho agathos* etc., *Minos* 321c–d. The authenticity of the *Minos* is often doubted, but it does have its champions

Thus too see the *Laws*, which returns to divine herding amid its own remarks about the age of Cronus. One elaborate wordplay speaks of *tên tou nou dianomên eponomazontas nomon* "calling the ordering of the mind by the name 'law.'" In this clause mind and herding, naming and law echo one another to make law a name for what a shepherd accomplishes.[28] Plato is restoring the art of drawing distinctions to the task of herding, or sees the herding cryptically at work in the act of dialectical division.

The *Statesman* brings the meanings together (and keeps them apart) in its characterization of the philosopher. Where one sense of *dianemô* belongs to the philosopher slicing genera into species, the other identifies the activity of a *nomeus* or herder. The philosopher recalls and reduplicates the god from that ancient time. This is the herding that still exists, now exceptionally. As the Magi predicted, things that were then endure with the names they had, give or take a little difference.

## Between here and the age of Cronus

If it works, the myth of cosmic cycles neutralizes mythology. One literally pivotal moment in world history locks all supernatural events and divine action away in another era. Henceforth and until the next turnabout such things don't happen.

At the same time, the motive to put away the mythical limits what the story can say by way of explanation – why the mythology ended. The result is that a smallest possible event is being posited as hugely consequential; and the result of that circumstance, where the exceptional philosopher is concerned, is that what makes some human beings stand apart from others looks incomprehensible.

The constraints on mythology for the Eleatic *xenos* compound other worries and complaints familiar from many of Plato's dialogues. No philosopher is going to tell about Cronus castrating his father on Plato's watch, or about the way Zeus defeated him. (The epigraph to this book and my comments on it suggest that Plato even in his private thoughts did not contemplate those events.) So, in ways we expect, *x* incorporates elements from mythology in sanitized fashion. According to mythology Cronus ate his children until Earth induced him to vomit.[29] *X* avoids describing the final moment of life in the other time, but we have to suppose that humans who steadily rejuvenate will finish by reentering their mothers' bodies as if being eaten. And when the universe switches to enter the age of Zeus, the children already engulfed will drop from parental bodies as Zeus's siblings reemerged from

as a genuine Platonic text. Even as an imitation of Platonic writing however it makes its point, hammering home a play on words that the real Plato would have indicated more lightly.

28 Plato *Laws* 4: remarks on age of Cronus, 713c–714b; "calling the ordering of the mind," etc., 714a. Gill (1979, 159) calls this a "pun-ridden sentence" and unpacks it.

29 Hesiod *Theogony* 495–507.

Cronus. Cronus's reverse peristalsis, induced in the original story as part of a generational rebellion, turns discreetly into the world's reversing orbit, which happens – in a philosopher's delicate phrasing – when the great god is said to "let go."

Along with the grisly and gross details of the gods' revolution, any sense of blame or fault also disappears. The explanation given for the change from that age to this one is not a mythical mechanism. An appointed time arrived and the god let go of the universe.[30]

For the same reason the turnabout has to constitute the *smikrotatên tês hautou kinêseôs parallaxin* "smallest change in its own motion."[31] There are two movements to the universe, both of them that perfect type of change that is uniform circular motion. But either a god is turning the world or no one is. Plato could not have one and the same god turn the world in opposite directions, as if one of those were the wrong way for the earth to spin and a god made *that* happen. Nor could different gods turn it in different ways, which would suggest a quarrel between gods and one of them turning the world the wrong way on purpose. Therefore the world makes the smallest possible change in motion from rotation in one direction to rotation the other way, either propelled by a god or counterspinning under its own momentum.

In its way of accounting for decisive change the myth calls to mind the decisive moment in *Republic* Book 5 when Socrates proposes rule by philosophers, *tinos … smikrotatou metabalontos … malista men henos* "changing something as small as possible, best of all a single element" to make the new city possible. The sophist Gorgias advertising the power of "language/speech [*logos*]" likewise wrote that "with the smallest and most invisible body it accomplishes the most divine things."[32]

The simultaneously momentous, world-altering, and yet almost casual change in the universe suggests that Plato is not really picturing a temporal change. For as fundamental cause of the world as we find it the reversal inspires too many demands for explanation: Why just then as appointed time? Who tells a god so great to let go? The implausibility about the world's reversal is one reason I still believe, as I argued a few years ago, that the story was imagined as spatial not temporal difference – that what it presents as *now* is better visualized as *here*.[33]

30 Plato *Statesman* 269c–270b.

31 Plato *Statesman* 269e. Rowe's distinct reading of this change in eras, already noted earlier, would require this point to be made in a much more complex fashion.

32 Plato *Republic* 5: *tinos smikrotatou metabalontos*, 473b; to make new city possible, 473c. On *logos*, Gorgias *Encomium of Helen* 8.

33 I argued this point in Pappas (2017). From that paper's first appearance to the present chapter the arguments have changed, but I still read the cosmic myth geographically, and for the same reasons.

## The geography of the golden age

The difficulties with thinking through the *Statesman*'s cosmic myth center around what relationship the present time might have with that other. The present imitates but alters the past, so that (for example) plain reversal in the sun's path survives in a sordid tale of adultery, incest, and cannibalism in the house of Atreus. Present and past have a gulf between them but also a bridge over that gulf; the same is true of present and future. The seductive communications that come to us make the age of Cronus sometimes look like a contrast to the present time and sometimes like a model for the present time to follow.

Putting Cronus both far back and far ahead only reinforces the sense that this is no ordinary chronological account, let alone a history. Most recently it was Dimitri El Murr who responded to the oddity of the myth with the thought that it describes "no more than two contradictory aspects of one and the same world, our world"; Harold Cherniss regarding the same unsatisfying temporality in Plato's tale proposed in 1954 that the ages are metaphors for aspects of the existing world.[34] I hope those readers would see the compatibility that I find to exist between their ideas and my own, namely that the age of Cronus precedes and succeeds the present as foreign nations lie across borders in all directions.

There is nothing new about conceiving temporal distance in spatial terms, not even anything new about visualizing history as a bordering land. The first Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang, living a century after Plato, is said to have ordered books from the past destroyed, *and also* to have built the Great Wall along his empire's border. This legendary compounding of fortifications is a reminder that cultures understand themselves to be touched similarly by other ages and other lands. The past is another country, even if – with apologies to L. P. Hartley – how differently they do things remains to be seen.

Besides very general analogies between *back then* and *over there*, and besides the particular problems with the time-sequence of Plato's story (the sense of being surrounded; the sharp divide that is nevertheless permeable), the story contains features that align with the classical Greek understanding of foreigners. First and most obvious the animal-like language; the governance by beings of another order; also the likely absence of philosophy. Above all in any event Greece sees non-Greece as a world out of the past.

In the *Statesman* myth the really gratuitous feature must be a language that people once shared with animals. This amounts to incomprehensible language, which is to say a language incomprehensible to Greeks, also known as a barbarian tongue. By Plato's time Greek authors had often compared

34 El Murr (2010, 296); Cherniss (1954, 25n21); see discussion in Mohr (1978). But Mohr is committed to a temporal reading of the *Statesman*'s myth as support for a literal temporal reading of the *Timaeus*.

foreign speech to animal sounds: birds above all, also bats and horses.[35] But even Homer long before, an author who hardly acknowledges the existence of different languges, compares Trojan forces to bleating ewes; their shouts are like the "scream of cranes," as if foreign language sounds like animal vocalizations. (*X* has already asked young Socrates to imagine how a philosophizing *geranos* "crane" might distinguish among animals.)[36]

*X* refers to the other age's communication with animals in tandem with what he questions the existence of, namely philosophy. Those people ought to have used their unintelligible words to philosophize with. Thus the appearance of philosophy distinguishes not only the present time but also the present place, Greece, the place where the comprehensible language is spoken.[37]

Plato's character Pausanias, in the *Symposium*, makes philosophy so uniquely Greek that barbarians despise the Greeks for practicing it.[38] This comes of their living in tyrannies, Pausanias says. The sense of non-Greeks governed by all-powerful monarchs – Persia served as the paradigm for foreignness – contrasted with the Greek idea of self-government in their *poleis*. Persia had a king so royal that even Greeks could identify him with no more than the word "king."

Rule by those vastly superior goes together with primitive existence, according to the *Statesman*'s myth of Cronus, but also according to many Greek characterizations of foreign lands. The ambivalence that readers today find in the Platonic myth matches the ambivalent ancient stereotype. Thus Thucydides equates barbarian practices of his time with the old Greek way, the best and the worst aspects of the past both overseas.[39] "Tyrants and savages lurked in the barbarian world," Edith Hall writes, "but it also supported idealized peoples and harmonious relations with heaven."[40] A long enough

35 Non-Greek speech like the song of birds, Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1050, Sophocles *Antigone* 1001, Aristophanes *Birds* 199–200; like squeak of bats, Herodotus *Histories* 4.183.4; like horses' voices, Aeschylus *Seven Against Thebes* 463–464. Later see Pliny *Natural History* 7.23, on mountain men who speak with barks. On barbarian speech in Herodotus, see Munson (2005).

36 Homer *Iliad*: ewes, 4.433–438, with explicit reference to the Trojan side's mix of languages; cranes, 3.1–7; Plato *Statesman* 263d; Gera (2003, 2).

37 In a later author, anxiety over foreign influence when locating philosophy's birth will have become a commonplace. Diogenes Laertius, in the passage that refers to Theopompus, asks when and where philosophy began and tries to undermine claims to philosophy among non-Greeks: *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 1.1–1.10. He offers grudging summaries of what seem to be the top contenders for non-Greek philosophies, those of the Persian Magi (1.6–1.9) and of the Egyptians (1.10), but declares that barbarian accomplishments were Greek. When it comes to philosophy, "even the name itself" – *kai auto to onoma* – resists translation into barbarian language (1.4).

38 Plato *Symposium* 182b–c.

39 Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* 1.6.6. Among later writers, see Pliny *Natural History* 7.9, on cannibalism long ago or far away. Ancient comments on foreignness, see Kennedy et al. (2013).

40 Hall (2002, 146). Romm (1994, 23n42) speaks of "the coincidence of temporal and spatial boundaries" in ancient geography, especially with respect to Ocean.

journey will take you even now to the age of Cronus. Homer's "blameless" Ethiopians live at an extreme distance from Greece *and* in a companionship with gods reminiscent of the Cronus people's herded condition. Up north the Hyperboreans live free from work and warfare, blessed with perfect climate as people are in the myth.[41]

At bottom, what Greeks saw everywhere around them were primitive foreigners. The east had Scythians, lazy and infertile.[42] Furthest east were the "dog-headed people" of India, whose mixed natures, human and canine, make them not only non-Greeks but specially also the kind to communicate with nonhumans.[43] Africa to the south, "Libya," was imagined as so prodigiously fertile, as if still belonging to an earlier era of world-creation, that a proverb said "Libya always brings forth something new."[44]

What about the *Statesman* myth's specification that our present age begins in orderly fashion, without call for decline within the age of Cronus, while the present age declines down into a worst state?[45] That translates into spatial differences. No decline occurs in a barbarian's coming to Greece, or in a barbarian nation's becoming Greek (as the Pelasgians were said to have done in Athens). One quick step over the border and it's done. For Greek cities to enter the barbarian world, however, is a sign of decline.

The difference in internal dynamics between now and then also corresponds to Plato's sense of the difference between here and there. He evinces great interest in the decline that befell or still befalls Athens and the Greek world, but he treats the non-Greek world as fixed. Whether or not this difference boils down to xenophobia, it agrees with the myth's making the (Greek) age of Zeus one of dangerous dynamic processes, and the (barbarian) age of Cronus static.

## Imitation across borders

Herodotus reinforces my reading of the *Statesman* myth and also suggests further implications. Herodotus follows the tradition in locating primordial

41 Homer: Ethiopians near the Ocean that bounds earth, *Iliad* 1.423, 23.206; generally distant, *Odyssey* 1.22–24, 4.84; friendly with gods, *Iliad* 1.424; *Odyssey* 1.24, 5.282. Pindar: Hyperboreans, *Pythian Ode* 10.34–44; cf. *Olympian Ode* 3.14–16. Far-off and primeval Ethiopians and Hyperboreans (Romm 1994, 45–77). Diodorus Siculus writing later will treat Britons according to the same categories (Isaac 2004, 135–136). Isaac provides unmatched readings of ancient "protoracist" texts. But in his effort to find the Greeks depicting neighbors as eternally inferior he neglects their temporal interpretation of physical distance.

42 Hippocrates *Airs Waters Places:* Scythians lazy, 20; infertile, 21.

43 Ctesias of Cnidus wrote *Indica*, a description of India, not long after the death of Socrates. The Byzantine Photius summarized parts of *Indica*, including its account of the *kunokephaloi* as simply dressed, long-lived, and just (Romm 1996, 121–135). For general assessment of Greeks on India, see now Stoneman (2019).

44 Aristotle *Generation of Animals* 746b7–13; Romm (1994, 88–89).

45 Plato *Statesman* 272e, 273b–e. Cinzia Arruzza pressed this point. I am thankful for the trouble it caused me.

peoples at the greatest distance from (Greek) Ionia. The rarest and most beautiful things are found in the earth's furthest regions, he says. More specifically, the *Histories* contain details about non-Greek life that bring the *Statesman*'s myth to mind: the Phoenicians circumnavigating Africa who saw the noonday sun in the north, as if the universe spun oppositely in faraway lands; the conversation that Darius the Persian king had with his advisers about kinds of government, which concluded with the selection of a single surpassing man the *basileus* "king"; Egypt the Opposite Land where men stay home weaving and eat food outdoors without shame.[46]

Read geographically, the *Statesman*'s story's account of a legendary past in lingering memory translates into the cultural diffusion that Herodotus chronicles. The double demand in the *Statesman*, to insulate the ages from one another and yet provide for emulation of the past, finds a parallel in the state of communication between Greece and other nations. Herodotus sees dress, religion, and technology drifting across borders, fragmenting and garbling as they spread. Where the *Statesman* myth pictures the present learning from antiquity what to call humanity's governor, Herodotus says that Egypt (where doves speak with humans) taught the names of the gods to the Greeks. The Ionian Greeks learned letters from the Phoenicians, changing them (as he reports) *oliga* "a little" to suit the writing of Greek.[47]

Incidentally such linguistic imitation does not appear only in Herodotus. Socrates spends most of Plato's *Cratylus* constructing etymologies for Greek words, making observations along the way that reinforce the sense of foreign as progenitor. Because not all the words he considers can be traced to other Greek words, Socrates says that some must have come from elsewhere. Greek terms of unknown origin might have been learned from foreigners. In some cases the old Greek word is today's foreign name for a thing, as Thucydides might have put it. Foreign languages preserve the sayings of an ancient era in a distant place.[48]

## Worldly exceptional or locally exceptional

The geographic reading has a most uncongenial implication. Philosophy in the age of Zeus reduces to philosophy as Greek phenomenon. That bias does exist, it turns up even in these dialogues that feature the Eleatic *xenos*. *X* may expand on what goes wrong when dividing humanity crudely into Greeks and

46 Herodotus *Histories*: rarest and most beautiful things, 3.116; "sailing around Libya they had the sun on the right," 4.42.4; arguments for rule by one, 3.80–3.82; followed by selection of *basileus*, 3.84.3; Egypt as Opposite Land, 2.35–36, a passage identifying 18 oppositions between Egypt and Greece (Redfield 1985, 103–104).

47 Herodotus *Histories*: names of gods from Egypt, 2.50; doves in Egypt speak, 2.57; Ionians learned writing from Phoenicians, 5.58.

48 Plato *Cratylus*: Greek terms learned from foreigners, 409d, 416a; old Greek word sometimes today's foreign word, 421c–d.

others, as if in cosmopolitan spirit; but he is the same character who describes a purifying cross-examination, and when Theaetetus says that Athenians call such a thing *paideia* "education," *X* replies that all Greeks call it that, as if cross-examination were practiced wherever Greek was spoken.[49]

Still, being expected does not make the bias welcome. We had begun approaching a figure who occupies the world of experience instead of some abstracted heaven, and who nevertheless escaped human tendencies toward vice and distraction. Do we only get an ethnocentric display?

The insistence on education as necessary cause to philosophy tempers the chauvinism and is probably meant to. Set Socrates aside, and all the times that he appears in the dialogues as unique, untutored, guided only by a voice from the gods. In the *Theaetetus* (as Chapter 7 argued) even Socrates embeds himself among schools of philosophy, recognizing instruction and the subject's long history. At his trial he may say that wealthy young men are *automatoi* "spontaneous" in following him around Athens – after all he denies that he teaches them – but more often what is *automatos* is subjected to criticism. Pericles lets his sons grow to maturity unguided, and the Ephesians who spring up free of schooling also behave like people free of sense. The *automatos* thinker largely fails at thinking.[50]

The *Republic* if more respectful of *automatoi* philosophers nevertheless keeps them in their place. Those philosophers who spring up naturally under known political constitutions owe no service to their cities, because those cities did not make them as the new city under consideration will have made its philosophers. And yet the natural philosophers are imperfect. The ones in the new city will be "better and more completely educated" and represent philosophy in its actualization.[51]

The dream of a city that trains its philosophers has not come true, and the *Statesman* suggests it never will or even should. Moreover the reader remembers as if watching a bomb's timer ticking that Socrates still has his court date coming. The world in its present condition does not create philosophers but rather strains to unmake them.

Even so the dream has found partial fulfillment in a world that contains philosophical instruction. Philosophical teaching in the *Theaetetus* was centered around schools and their societies. The *Sophist* advanced a method

49 Plato *Sophist* 229d. For other striking assertions of Greek chauvinism in Plato see *Republic* 5.469b–471b; *Menexenus* 239b, 240d, 245d.

50 Plato: *automatoi* young men, *Apology* 23c2–4; Socrates doesn't teach, 19d–e; sons of Pericles *automatoi*, *Protagoras* 320a3; Ephesians *automatoi, Theatetus* 180c1–2. See the denial of *automatos* wisdom at *Euthydemus* 282b–c. These comments on the *automatos* are partly inspired by conversation with Michael Naas. I regret that Naas (2018) came to my attention too late to help shape this chapter.

51 Plato *Republic* 7.520: philosophers *automatoi* in other cities, b; better educated in new city, b–c.

and showed how to implement it, classifying the method associated with Socrates (such as it is) among the other traits of the sophists.

The *Sophist*'s instructor enters the *Statesman* more pedagogical than ever, digressing as he goes about how to practice philosophy and what the teaching of it is. The examples have already come up: One philosophizes without undue concern for names of things; one defines in order to practice dialectic; a kind should divide into species or cut at the joints. But teaching has only been entirely accomplished when it creates new teachers, and so *X* mixes educational theory into his quest for the statesman.[52]

With such instruction you may make a tradition. In that tradition the specially trained philosophers *dianemousi* "divide," as if in imitation of the shepherding done elsewhere, for example, in Asia Minor. The Persian queen in Aeschylus is surprised that Greeks have no *poimanôr* "shepherd" lording over them as Persians did, but the philosopher might answer, "They have me." In a world that otherwise puts all people on a par, so that even being tyrannized you are governed by another human essentially like you, the philosopher offers all you can know of human difference, however powerless even undetected a royal the philosopher is. (Socrates upon being condemned to death compares himself casually to "the king," regarding them as a pair of men equally gratified by endless undreaming sleep. Another time he says he values the possession of a good friend over the gold of Darius, or even over possessing Darius himself. In such ways the philosopher emulates the shepherding king.)[53]

If the myth is describing space not time, not a lost divine age whose legacy existing humans imitate but a distant culture, divine in its way, influential by unexpected routes – does that mean that philosophy has been imported too? Then *X*'s excursus about Greeks and barbarians had cosmopolitan intent behind it after all. Remember that good teachers know how to belabor a point in response to a present question in a way that also addresses future questions. *X* went on too long about dividing human beings to show young Socrates how division works, but also to plant the theme of Greek and foreign.

In that excursus the *xenos* names two foreign nationalities, the Lydians and the Phrygians. Those were not the ethnicities best known to Greeks, for whom Persians exemplified foreigners and the (enslaved) non-Greek occupants of Athens were most often Scythian or Thracian. And the Eleatic, coming as he did from Italy, would have known western foreign nations better than he knew either Lydia or Phrygia, both located in Asia Minor.

Again the age of the foreign is relevant: Lydia and Phrygia carried associations for classical Greece of original lands: places where things began.

52 Plato *Statesman*: no undue concern for names, 261d; dialectic training the goal, 285d; kind into species, 262b; chop at joints, 287c. The teaching of teaching centers on *X*'s talk of examples and his example of weaving: 277d–e, 278e–279b, 287a–b, 308d–e, 309b.

53 Aeschylus *Persians* 241–243; Plato *Apology* 40c–d; *Lysis* 211e. Aeschylus's word *poimanôr* derives from *poimên*, one of the words for "shepherd" also found in the *Statesman* 275b, c.

Chapters 3 and 8 mentioned Lydia as the place of the first tyrant and the first money. Plato had read Herodotus and knew that according to the *Histories* the ascendancy of Gyges in Lydia initiated the chain that constituted everything the Greeks knew as history.

Plato's dialogues rarely mention Phrygia, but in a different way Herodotus locates that people at the beginning of history too. He reports on an experiment to isolate children and discover which language they would speak on their own. The babies say *bekos* the Phrygian word for "bread" or "cake." It apparently follows that human language began with the Phrygians, the oldest people on earth, or anyway the first to name things.[54]

The most substantive reference to Phrygians in Plato involves their language. Socrates tracing the origins of words can't find anything in Greek to connect to *pur* "fire." Considering (as he says) that "the Phrygians call it thus too, only turning it around a little [*smikron ti paraklinontes*]," it seems plausible to attribute the word to them. Likewise the words for water and dogs, *hudôr* and *kunas*.[55] This is the copying that both preserves a word and changes it, as in the *dianemô* that characterizes the leader in the age of Cronus and the philosopher in our world, even if one of those is a divine babysitter and the other one is charged with corrupting the youth.

Socrates passes over the philosophical significance of these words, but it's hard to miss. Thales famous for saying all is water must have had to learn the word for his philosophy from the Phrygians, as Heraclitus did with "fire." The connection between dogs and philosophy lies even closer to home, in the name for that group of Socratics known as Cynics.

Could philosophy have begun under foreign influence? – yes, given a twist or a little change, as the Ionians slightly changed the Phoenician alphabet, as a king might learn philosophy and found the *Republic*'s city, and as the god let go of the universe's helm and let it spin the opposite way again.

In the case of philosophy the slight but overwhelming change turns ordinary language into an ontological lexicon. The Phrygians knew fire and water but not what the names for those things would grow into in Greek. Greek philosophy did not teach itself, and at the same time the tradition owes no foreign debt. As it did in the explanatory mechanism of a cosmic-cycle myth, the minuscule of the change indicates the opposite demands being placed upon it: enough to account for everything that happens, not enough to assign blame or credit elsewhere. No errant god or blameworthy act caused the world to reverse its spin and bring war and death to humanity, and likewise no philosophizing overseas brought philosophy to Greece.

This might be as close as the dialogues get to an explanation of that exceptional soul the philosopher. Training makes philosophers, but the training

54 Herodotus *Histories* 2.2.1–5. The Phrygian *bekos* may be the origin of the English "bake." In other words, there is some genuine awareness of non-Greek languages at work in Herodotus's anecdote.

55 Plato *Cratylus* 410a.

gives the impression of having begun in a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what people had done in other countries. The fantasy of the normal–exceptional philosopher becomes more specific; it might be better to say that we see more specifically how fantastical it is. Someone who can be influenced as the philosopher is says the same words as everyone else yet understands them differently.

What we lose in philosophy, as earlier parts of the book said were lost in connection with love and the city, is something both here before us and incomparable and greater in principle. Plato tries to theorize the possibility of exceeding what we know of *erôs*, *polis*, and *philosophos*. The effort may work just fine in practice: taking your homeland as sacred, the love you feel as if it were made in heaven, the honorable rare person as a breed apart. And yet it can't be accounted for in theory.

It is no cause for joy or triumphalism if Platonic aspirations toward heaven end up on earth. Stanley Cavell once said, in reply to Wittgenstein's self-description (and justification of self) as destroying "nothing but houses of cards": "We have been living in these intellectual edifices since roughly the beginning of systematic philosophy in Plato." Just because you can knock the thing down, doesn't mean people have not been seeking shelter there. In the same spirit it is reasonable for Aristotle to have cast out the Forms and called them hums and twangs – yet people have been using those sounds to point toward the things that matter.[56] As with Forms so with their representatives in experience. We all want good love rather than bad, a good city to occupy, and confidence that we are philosophizing not just noising around.

Call it exceptionalism or anything else. The turn of thought toward the exceptional is what brings Plato's readers along with him. Some readers appeal to the staging and characterization in his dialogues; for agreeability's sake I will accept their sense of being enticed and only ask what else might account for the enticement. My own sense, and this book has gone to some length to spell that sense out, is that Plato attracts his readers most of all with the sight of impossible desires' finding expression neither sarcastic nor fevered, in the trust that such things *can* be said, if not yet then soon, maybe in the next beginning that philosophy makes for itself.

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56 Cavell (2006, 16); Aristotle *Posterior Analytics* 1.22 83a32–33.

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